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ABSTRACT

The ideas presented in the sourcebook, and in a summarized companion volume, "Leading for Learning: Reflective Tools for School and District Leaders," support leaders' efforts to improve student learning in schools and districts. The ideas constitute a framework for enabling powerful, equitable learning for all students, outlining five areas of leadership action and several pathways for advancing student and professional learning while building a system that connects and sustains these efforts. Part 1, "Leading for Learning: Essential Ideas and Tasks," reviews the central ideas laid out in the companion volume and offers additional mini-examples. It further explains and offers a more complete set of source references for these ideas. Part 2, "Leading for Learning in School and District Contexts," presents extended examples of framework ideas in action at the school and district levels. The examples trace the evolution of leadership strategies aimed at learning improvement. Part 3, "Using Reflective Tools to Support Leading for Learning," presents an image of the reflective tools currently in use within schools, districts, and leadership preparation programs. An appendix describes 23 pathways to learning. (Contains 111 references.) (SM)

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LEADING FOR LEARNING SOURCEBOOK:

Concepts and Examples

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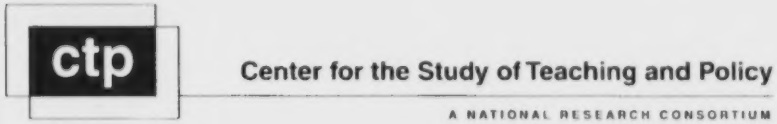
The Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, through its LEADERS Count initiative, are promoting a national movement to improve educational leadership to support learning, especially in high-need areas. Using a variety of programmatic, communications, and research strategies and working with a select number of states and districts, the Funds are supporting work aimed at: increasing the pool of quality candidates for leadership; strengthening the abilities of superintendents and principals to improve student learning; and creating more supportive working conditions for education leaders to succeed. As part of the initiative, the Funds commissioned CTP to develop this conceptual framework linking leadership and learning.



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The Center's program of research is carried out in collaboration with other research organizations, among them other national research centers. The Center is affiliated with a variety of professional and advocacy organizations that represent teachers, teacher educators, state and local policymakers, disciplinary groups, and educational reform interests.

Both this document, *Leading for Learning Sourcebook: Concepts and Examples,* and its summary, *Leading for Learning: Reflective Tools for School and District Leaders,* can be downloaded free of charge from the Center's web site: www.ctpweb.org

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LEADING FOR LEARNING SOURCEBOOK:

Concepts and Examples

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February 2003

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The reflective ideas and tools for educators offered in this *Sourcebook* and its companion volume, *Leading for Learning: Reflective Tools for School and District Leaders*, synthesize ideas from many sources, including research literature, examples of leadership in action, and educators' craft knowledge. While casting a wide net in the research literature, we concentrated on work related to instructional leadership, school reform and renewal, teacher learning and professional community, teacher leadership, organizational learning, policy-practice connections, and education in high-poverty, high-diversity settings. The sources appear in endnotes and in a bibliography.

From these literatures, we developed an overall framework that includes reflective ideas and tools for education leaders. To ground them in practice, we assembled examples that, with some exceptions, derive from actual cases that were reported in published research, from ongoing studies, or contributed by practitioners.

A working draft, field tested across a five-month period, from April through August of 2002, was refined through solicited critiques, interactive working sessions, and dialogue following presentations. More specifically, 25 reviewers, evenly divided between scholars and practicing educators at both school and district levels, scrutinized the draft from a variety of perspectives. Working sessions included a meeting with members of the National College of School Leadership from the United Kingdom, a session with the University of Washington Policymakers Exchange, a week-long institute for aspiring system-level educational leaders, and a similar gathering of school principals. In addition, we presented successive versions at national meetings of scholars and practitioners, including: the American Education Research Association, the University Council on Educational Administration, the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds' *Leaders Count* Initiative, and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.

In all, the development team received commentary and suggestions from over 300 individuals. These included a broad spectrum of working educators and individuals outside of education, including scholars and practitioners from this country and abroad, and from different racial or ethnic backgrounds; educators working at district level and in schools; and individual experts working in elementary and secondary schools. The majority were practicing school and district leaders. This final version includes contributions from all sources.

In particular, we wish to thank the following individuals, who made important contributions to our thinking at one or more stages during the development of this document: Christopher Alejano, Anthony Amato, John Andes, Nancy Arnold, Sandy Austin, Kathy Bartlett, Denise Bill, Craig Blum, Beth Boatright, Gene Bottoms, Bill Boyd, Monte Bridges, Carl Bruner, Kathy Budge, Joe Burke, Tony Busch, Pete Bylsma, Karen

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Michael S. Knapp, Director
Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy (CTP)

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A Call for Education Leadership

A sense of urgency pervades public education these days as students struggle to meet the high standards set by their state and the nation. Teachers are pressed as never before to improve education quality and equity. Achievement gaps persist, and parents of students who attend low-performing schools increasingly seek an escape from public education.

The call for strong leadership in education is unmistakable—leadership that brings about significant improvement in learning and a narrowing of achievement gaps. Yet many school and district administrators report their time is consumed by matters unrelated to learning improvement. Even with enough time to focus, the leaders' task is complex, and it is not always clear to them what they should be doing to contribute to that goal.

Support for leaders' improvement efforts

The ideas presented in this *Sourcebook* and in a summarized companion volume *(Leading for Learning: Reflective Tools for School and District Leaders)* support leaders' efforts to improve student learning in schools and districts. The ideas constitute a framework—a mental map and accompanying reflective tools—for enabling powerful, equitable learning for all students. To that end, the framework outlines five areas of leadership action and several routes ("pathways") for advancing student and professional learning, while building a system that connects and sustains these efforts.

Used as a leaders' toolbox or dynamic organizer, the framework is primarily for school and district administrators who bear formal responsibility for improving student learning and are most able to bring influence and resources to support that goal. It is also for those who can "lead for learning" from other positions, including: teacher leaders, teacher developers, union leaders, community leaders, and policymakers. These individuals can use the framework to begin leading for learning in different kinds of schools and districts.

The ideas and suggestions presented here are based on published and emerging research, combined with the craft knowledge of a wide range of practicing educators (see Sources and Acknowledgments)[1]. The authors reviewed various bodies of research from both inside and outside the field of education, as noted in the Endnotes and Bibliography. The review and revision process involved over 300 educators, scholars, and other professionals whose suggestions were subsequently integrated into this document. By themselves, many of the ideas advanced here are not new—together, however, they provide a new synthesis of thinking in the field that can help leaders find direction in the face of complex challenges.

The framework is not a set of recipes or a specific change theory. Nor does it outline specific standards for leadership practice, such as those created by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) or national administrators associations, which offer a vision of desirable practice for individuals with particular roles.[2] While compatible with such standards, the framework does not prescribe; rather, it seeks to guide leaders in different positions and different environments toward defining an improvement agenda and developing strategies for action.

Issues for leaders

The companion document, *Leading for Learning: Reflective Tools for School and District Leaders*, introduces the central ideas of the framework in relation to the story of a struggling learner and his teacher. The story captures essential issues facing any leaders who want to provide more powerful and equitable learning opportunities to all students under their charge. To fulfill that responsibility, leaders encounter certain issues and questions:

- **Focus on learning.** How can leaders know enough about student learning and instructional methods in particular classrooms, subjects, and grades, in order to focus improvement efforts?
- **Professional development.** How can teachers learn to improve their practice, and what conditions can motivate and support their learning?
- **Environmental engagement.** How do family and community conditions contribute to the current situation, and how can they be made part of the solution?
- **Strategic action.** Once there is a focus for improvement, what specific actions, and by whom, exert the greatest influence on changing what teachers and learners do? What resistances stand in the way, and what can leaders do about them?
- **Coherence.** How can leaders' actions and resources have a mutually reinforcing effect on learners' and teachers' work?

Add to these an overarching question that concerns sustainability: How can leaders do all of these things and survive—and help sustain improvement efforts over time—in the face of demands, pressures, and constraints that can easily overwhelm good intentions?

The answers are not simple. School and district leaders' ability to imagine constructive answers to these questions depends on their understanding of existing and potential connections between leading and learning. To act, leaders need a set of reflective tools to help them clarify their goals for improvement and visualize ways to move forward.

The *Sourcebook* and how to use it

The *Sourcebook* offers a more detailed picture of leading for learning, building on the presentation of key ideas and elements found in the *Leading for Learning* summary volume. The *Sourcebook* is organized in three parts. The first reviews the central ideas laid out in the companion volume and offers additional mini-examples, as well as further explanation and a more complete set of source references for these ideas. The second part offers extended examples of framework ideas in action, at both school and district levels. These examples trace the evolution of leadership strategies aimed at learning improvement, from a point in time at which little effective leadership was being exercised to a point at which many elements of an effective leading-for-learning strategy were in place. Along the way, the case stories are annotated to show how the asserted connections between leading and learning manifest themselves. The third part presents images of the reflective tools currently in use, within schools, districts, and leadership preparation programs. An appendix offers further detail about the pathways to learning and potential leadership opportunities that lie along them.

Readers may decide to use the *Sourcebook* in various ways. For example, they could use it to further explore particular ideas highlighted in the summary volume. They could use it to help visualize the process by which learning-focused leadership can be established and sustained in educational settings, or to visualize their own potential uses of the framework. They may also use it as a reference while considering particular possibilities suggested by the framework.

PART I
Leading for Learning: Essential Ideas and Tasks

To imagine leading for learning, it is essential to grasp a set of foundational concepts about leadership, learning, and their potential connections. With these concepts in mind, one could then explore their practical meaning in school and district settings, while understanding the challenges encountered in the process of realizing these ideas.

Foundational Concepts: How Leaders Influence Learning

Understanding the fundamentals of leading for learning can begin with images of effective learning and teaching as it occurs in the classroom. Consider what is going on in this fourth-year humanities teacher's classroom within an urban middle school:[3]

> The teacher and her colleagues devised a two-year humanities curriculum for their students, built around projects addressing broad topics that span U.S. history from after the Post-Civil War period to the present. Immigration is one of the topics for her eighth graders, who are African-American and Latino youngsters from predominantly low-income backgrounds. As part of this project, she divides them into three groups (e.g., Chinese, Mexican, and Eastern European immigrants). Students in each group do research and, with a partner, put together a debate, taking either a pro- or anti-immigrant position. To prepare for the debate, and to fulfill other requirements of this project, students are given a set of readings and other materials. Many of them are primary documents, such as the original form from the Homestead Act that people filled out to buy land; illustrations and photographs; advertisements announcing the great land rush and railroad routes; newspaper commentary about immigration; political cartoons, and much more.
>
> Students respond enthusiastically to this curriculum, though few have encountered anything like it in their previous schooling. The teacher provides them a great deal of material and structure to help them work productively with this assignment and with each other. For example, the students receive a written outline of the project that includes objectives, checklists of what is needed before starting, the knowledge to be gained, writing plans, assignments, etc. Students hand in multiple drafts of written products and meet with the teacher regarding their progress. Rubrics with a four-point scale, roughly fashioned to correspond to state and district assessment scales, detail grading and assessment for both written products and oral presentations.
>
> The teacher and her colleagues emphasize several skills they feel are critical for success in the project work (e. g., how to read text, mark it, and take bullet notes). In choosing which skills to teach, they are also responding to the requirements of the state exams. A fair amount of time is spent, especially at the beginning of the school year, directly teaching these skills. Time is also devoted to teaching the skills needed to engage in successful peer review and collaborative group work.

This glimpse of urban middle school teaching in action reveals little about its context within a strong professional community that is guided by a principal with a clear vision of powerful, equitable learning, and where opportunities lie for furthering that vision. In conjunction with teacher leaders (e.g., the eighth-grade teacher example) and with the support of the district office, the principal has helped her school create curriculum like this for many areas in the school program.

Her efforts derived from a picture of what is happening in powerful, equitable instruction, which affords her and other leaders various ways to be involved—each relating to a different facet of the interaction among learners, teacher, and content.[4] In effect, she is paying attention to the following dimensions of what is taking place in the classroom:

- **What learners and teachers bring to the classroom.** Teachers and learners bring prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and assumptions about schooling and each other. In this instance, the teacher brought a museum education background and facility working with issues in the humanities. The students brought a mix of backgrounds, culturally different from the White middle-class background of most teachers at the school, and conditioned by the experience of poverty in a large city. The backgrounds of participants in the classroom provide one important reference point for meaning and relevance of instruction.
- **How learners interact with each other and with the teacher.** Teacher and students are assigned (or choose, as in high schools) to work together, and in that context develop perceptions of each other and relationships over time. In this instance, the teacher and students have developed a comfortable working relationship over a two-year period, in a small school setting that makes it easier for the participants to know each other well. The structure of classroom time and other time in the building gives the teacher many different ways of interacting with students (e.g., individual writing conferences, group guidance, direct whole group teaching, small group advisory sessions).
- **What teachers know about the content of instruction and how young people acquire it.** Various forces define what is to be taught (state standards, district frameworks, textbook choices) but ultimately teachers' own grasp of the subject matter—and conceptions of knowledge itself—set boundaries around what will be taught and learned. In operational form, the teachers' knowledge of content and of how young learners connect with it shapes the nature of academic tasks.[5] In this instance, the teacher has a well-developed set of ideas about the humanities (history, literature, and social studies), and her knowledge base complements that of her colleagues. Together, they are able to bring a rich base of knowledge to bear on both their curriculum design and teaching itself.
- **How learners engage with academic tasks and content.** How students engage in academic tasks and how teachers guide and support that engagement defines the opportunity for learning to take place. In particular, students' engagement indicates degrees of ownership of the task at hand. Given demanding and motivating academic tasks and considerable support for engaging in this kind of work, students, in this instance, choose to engage and are helped to stay engaged by a combination of teacher and peer support. It is not easy for these students, but by now, their third year in this school, they have begun to get comfortable with this kind of work and to develop some proficiency at it.

- **What learning is and how it can be demonstrated.** What takes place in the classroom ultimately reflects the participants' notions of learning itself and how learning can be demonstrated. In this instance, the teachers have devised various ways of demonstrating learning in the humanities (project writing, oral presentations, a portfolio of work that demonstrates improvement) and have defined what good student work looks like. These measures complement existing state and district measures.

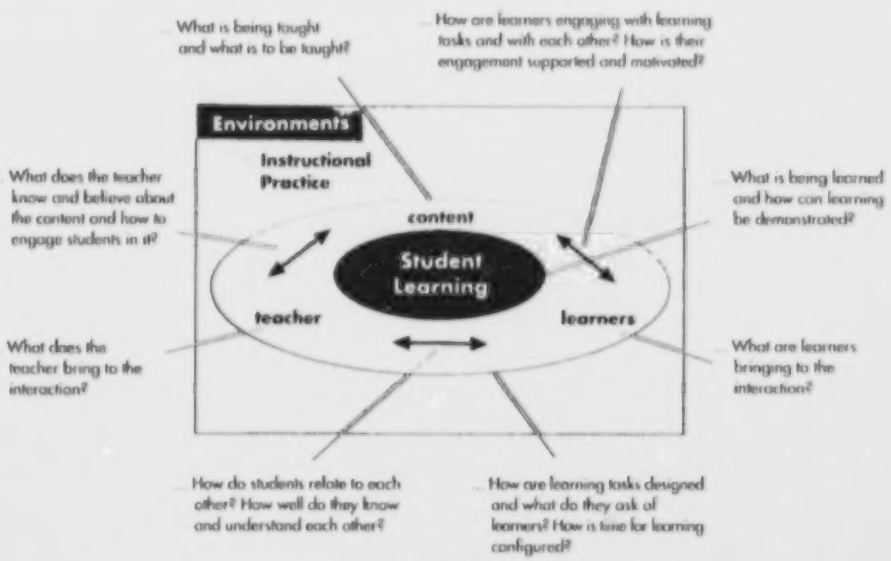
What is taking place in this (or any) teaching situation can be represented schematically, as shown in Figure 1 below. As the Figure and the example imply, each aspect of teaching and learning may bear the stamp of leaders at various levels of the system. But before exploring how leaders can have such impacts, it is helpful to clarify several things about leadership and also about the multiple levels of learning that take place in this situation.

Leadership in schools and districts

Put most simply, leadership can be thought of as the act of imparting purpose to an organization as well as motivating and sustaining effort in pursuit of that purpose.[6] In schools and districts that means many things—from articulating broad visions of how the schools serve students in a pluralistic, democratic society, to guiding the way operational details in the daily life of schools are addressed.

With an eye to improving student learning, leadership theories and activities have long focused on the immediate support and supervision of instruction.[7] This *Sourcebook*, however, is about more than what is generally referred to as "instructional leadership." Traditionally,

Figure 1: *Foundation for Leadership: An Interactional View of Instruction*


What is being taught and what is to be taught?
How are learners engaging with learning tasks and with each other? How is their engagement supported and motivated?
Environments
Instructional Practice
What does the teacher know and believe about the content and how to engage students in it?
content
Student Learning
What is being learned and how can learning be demonstrated?
teacher
learners
What does the teacher bring to the interaction?
What are learners bringing to the interaction?
How do students relate to each other? How well do they know and understand each other?
How are learning tasks designed and what do they ask of learners? How is time for learning configured?

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that concept has concerned the role of the principal and other school-level leaders (staff developers, district coordinators, mentor teachers) in supervising, guiding, and monitoring instruction and instructional practice.

While clearly part of the story, that notion of instructional leadership misses a more inclusive picture of leadership that embraces work carried out simultaneously by individuals at different levels of the system, and with different purviews over and proximity to instruction.[8] In this sense, leading for learning implies, at the school level, the joint work of principals, assistant principals, department heads, school-based mentors and coaches, teacher leaders, and others. At the district level, it implies superintendents, assistant or deputy superintendents, school board members, directors and coordinators, and district-supported staff with crosscutting assignments, not to mention leaders in the community who play a role in guiding and supporting the district's work.

Furthermore, a more inclusive view of educational leadership treats leadership as an attribute of the organization as a whole, embedded not only in formal positions of authority (principal and superintendent), but also in functions that crosscut positions (e.g., professional development, professional accountability, curriculum development).[9] In these formulations, leadership also includes leaders' thinking, feelings, and the meanings they and others attach to events in the organization. Finally, a broader view of leadership highlights a broad array of leadership tools, not only the conventional toolkit of positional leaders (resources, requirements and sanctions, exhortations, symbols), but also modeling, relationship building, and systematic inquiry into organizational performance, not to mention the creation of policies, structures, and incentives of many kinds.[10]

Three learning agendas in context

In contemporary public education, powerful, equitable student learning is the central goal of most educators and large segments of the public, as it is in the case noted above. The underlying vision emphasizes providing all students, regardless of their backgrounds, the means to master challenging content and skills in subject areas, develop habits of mind for further learning, and prepare for fulfilling occupational futures and citizenship in a democracy.[11]

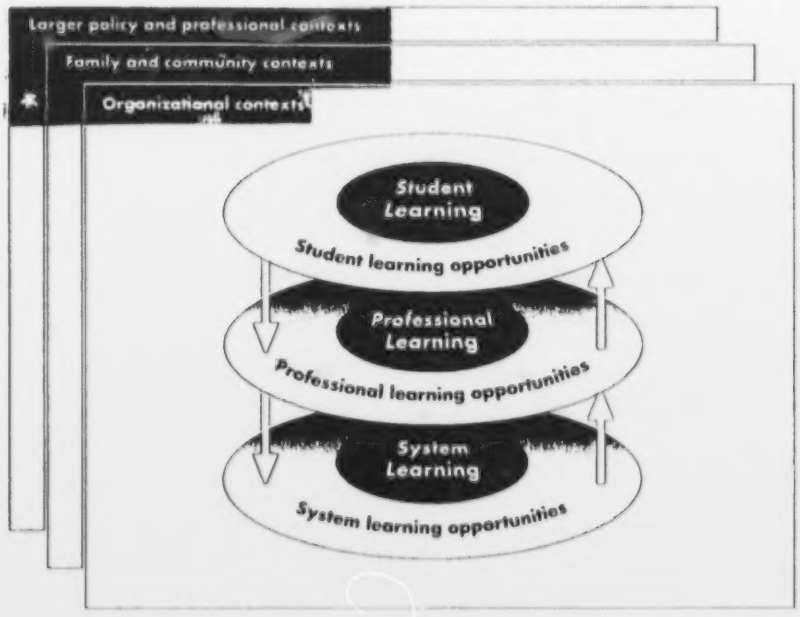
In seeking this kind of student learning and the instruction that brings it about, leaders encounter two other learning agendas—one for professionals and another for the educational system as a whole. Visualizing all three learning agendas, the opportunities for learning each entails, and the connections among them is an essential step in leading for learning. Figure 2 displays these agendas in the context of the organization (district or school), community, and the larger policy environment.

Student learning

Powerful and equitable instruction, schematically represented in Figure 1 above, enables all students to develop deep subject-matter knowledge and skills and habits of mind that will stand them in good stead in new educational or working situations.[12] Participating in this kind of learning experience builds a sense of empowerment and possibility in a world that is not always welcoming to young people from all walks of life. Learning can be thought of as both the act and result of acquiring knowledge, skills, habits of mind, and a sense of

empowerment. As such, the concept includes the demonstration of learning through measures that show what and how much learning has occurred. Hence, the measurement of student learning—and interpretation of such measures—is also of concern to educational leaders. In many settings, test scores may be taken as the measure of learning, by decree or default, and the larger policy environment may give school or district leaders little choice in the matter. Because no single measure can effectively capture the full range of what students are expected to learn, educational leaders wishing to focus attention on a richer picture of what students know and know how to do will likely consider and promote the use of other kinds of measures, as they have done in the case just described.[13]

Figure 2: *Three Learning Agendas, in Context*



Professional learning

For reasons that are both obvious and subtle, students' learning depends on what the professionals who work with them come to know and know how to do. Leaders, therefore, need an equally rich picture of what and how they and their professional colleagues learn, signaled by the second learning agenda in Figure 2.[14] Teachers' and administrators' learning includes the act and result of acquiring knowledge, skills, and perspectives that inform their practice.

Opportunities for continuous professional learning can take various forms. Those most valuable for the improvement of practice include interactions with other professionals who offer ideas and evidence of effective practice, provide feedback and suggestions for improvement, and give moral support essential to the improvement process. Such professional interactions to improve teaching and learning can occur in teacher communities within a

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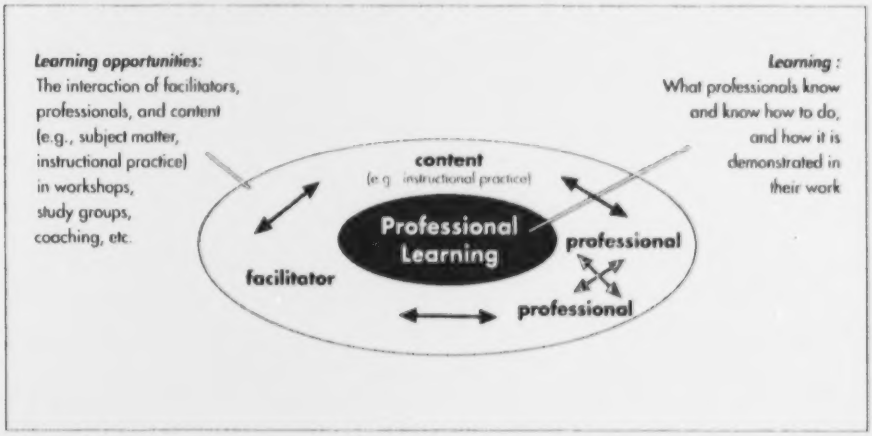
school, in district-wide teacher or administrator communities, between coaches/mentors and teachers or administrators, and in institutes and networks within and beyond the local school systems.[15] The interplay of content, facilitator or leader, and professional community is captured by the diagram in Figure 3, paralleling the learning environment for students in the classroom. In this model, the content of professional learning for teachers is creating effective instruction for students. For administrators, it is both supporting requirements for improved classroom instruction and better learning environments for teachers.

Figure 3: *Professional Learning and Learning Opportunities*


Learning opportunities:
The interaction of facilitators, professionals, and content (e.g., subject matter, instructional practice) in workshops, study groups, coaching, etc.
Learning:
What professionals know and know how to do, and how it is demonstrated in their work
content
(e.g. instructional practice)
Professional Learning
facilitator
professional
professional

System learning

Through inquiry into how a district or school functions and performs, leaders can support what we may call "system learning." This includes assembling and interpreting information about the system as a whole (note that either the school or district can be thought of as a "system") plus developing new policies, practices, and structures that alter and hopefully enhance its performance. The concept derives from notions of "organizational learning," which posit that the school or district as a whole accumulates information encoded in institutional stories and routines, and over time, the organization alters its behavior in response to external stimuli and new understandings of the participants.[16] In essence, the concept assumes an organizational whole that is greater than the sum of individual professionals' thinking and efforts. The notion of system learning must not be taken too literally, however. Organizations do not "think" or "perceive"; individuals who staff them do.[17] Still, organizations act in ways that transcend individuals' efforts though they can be guided by individuals, especially those who exercise leadership.

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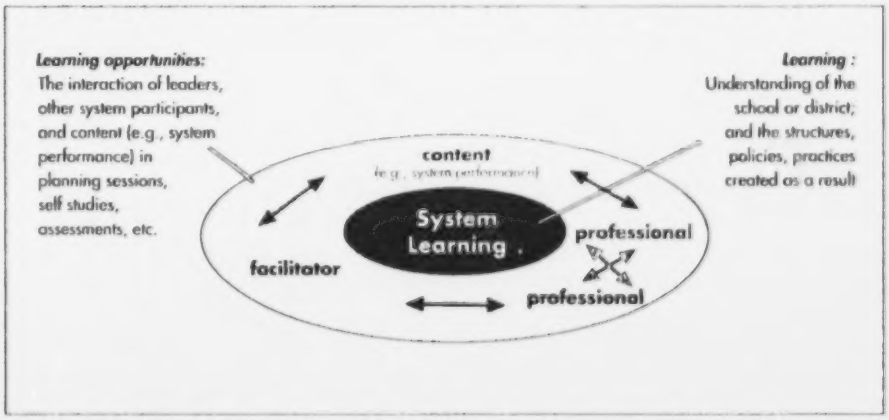
As suggested by Figure 4 below, opportunities for system learning arise through the interaction of system participants (who are collectively the "learners"), as they examine and seek to shape system performance, guided by individuals assuming facilitative roles (the "teachers"). This happens in system-wide planning endeavors; evaluation of policies, programs, and resource use, including self-studies and assessments of various kinds; "action research" focused on system-wide issues; and identification of indicators to measure progress toward defined goals.

Figure 4: *System Learning and Learning Opportunities*


Learning opportunities:
The interaction of leaders, other system participants, and content (e.g., system performance) in planning sessions, self studies, assessments, etc.
Learning :
Understanding of the school or district, and the structures, policies, practices created as a result
content
(e.g., system performance)
System Learning
professional
facilitator
professional

How the learning agendas relate to each other and to their contexts

The three learning agendas—student, professional, and system—are shaped by each other and by the environments in which they sit. Therein lies one of the biggest challenges for educational leaders: to see the points of connection and mutual influence. Leaders who do so discover how—

- The nature of learning and teaching becomes input to professional learning, which, in turn, guides improvements in the classroom, as suggested by the up and down arrows in Figure 1.
- Activities in the classroom and in professional learning venues become input to system learning, which, in turn, can influence the other two learning agendas, once again signaled by the vertical arrows in Figure 1.
- All three agendas are both constrained and enriched by the environments in which they sit.

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Leading for learning

In essence, leading for learning means creating powerful, equitable learning opportunities for students, professionals, and the system, and motivating or compelling participants to take advantage of these opportunities. Research, theory, and craft knowledge suggest that leaders can accomplish this by committing themselves to five areas of action.[18] Specifically, school and district leaders are more likely to advance powerful and equitable student learning by:

Leading for Learning: Five Areas of Action

School and district leaders can advance powerful and equitable student learning by:

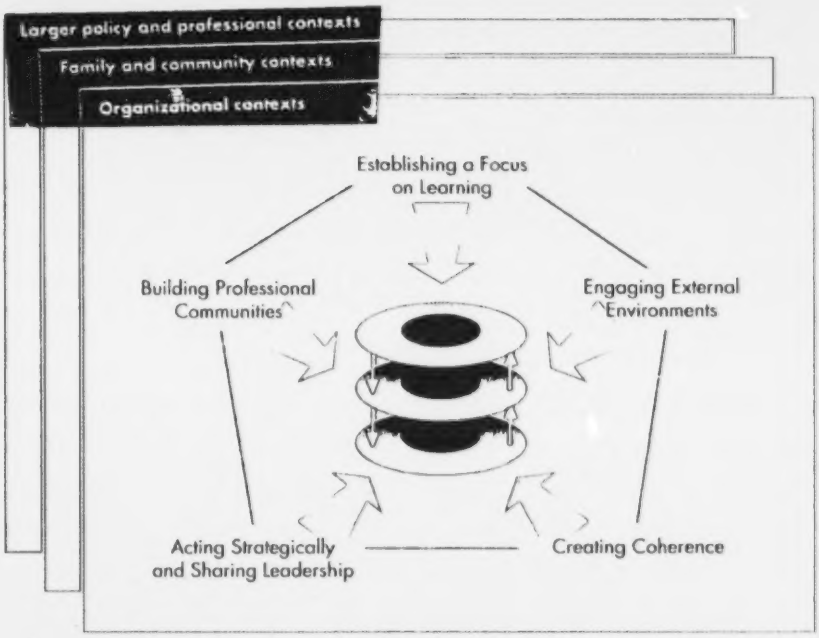
1. **Establishing a focus on learning**—by persistently and publicly focusing their own attention and that of others on learning and teaching.
2. **Building professional communities that value learning**—by nurturing work cultures that value and support their members' learning.
3. **Engaging external environments that matter for learning**—by building relationships and securing resources from outside groups that can foster students' or teachers' learning.
4. **Acting strategically and sharing leadership**—by mobilizing effort along multiple "pathways" that lead to student, professional, or system learning, and by distributing leadership across levels and among individuals in different positions.
5. **Creating coherence**—by connecting student, professional, and system learning with one another and with learning goals.

Central to these assertions about leading for learning is the notion that leaders take concrete steps along pathways that lead to student, professional, and system learning. In this sense, leaders can exert a direct and identifiable influence on learning results.

As illustrated by Figure 5 below, the five areas of action are not a linear sequence of steps for improving learning and teaching. Rather, each supports the others, and leaders operating from different positions can pursue activities in each area simultaneously. That said, leaders may find it more natural to start with the first—establishing a focus on learning—which forms a natural foundation for the other four. But from there, leaders could productively begin in many places, depending on the opportunities and constraints within a given school or district, to build the full set of conditions supporting learning.

The five areas of action are likely to have a mutually reinforcing effect on each other. Leaders pursuing a few of these areas while ignoring others may achieve some positive learning results. Applied together, however, they constitute a more powerful array of conditions for supporting student, professional, and system learning.

Figure 5: *Overview: Leading for Learning*



What Leading for Learning Means in Practice

Leaders at different levels of public education can work to improve students' learning by pursuing the five areas of action introduced above. Leading for learning in each area rests on underlying ideas, includes essential tasks for leaders, and encounters predictable challenges. In each area, examples illustrate the issues and highlight opportunities leaders might discover in particular school, community, and system contexts.

1 Establishing a Focus on Learning

School and district leaders can focus their own and others' attention on learning in a variety of ways, ranging from small details of their daily practice to large gestures and strategic actions. Consider one example from a district leader's weekly routine:

> The superintendent of an urban district serving 13,000 students devotes 7:30 to 8:30 every Monday morning to meeting with students at their school to talk over what they are learning. Each week, she selects a different school and several students at random. Nothing is allowed to interfere with this standing commitment.[19]

And another example from an elementary school:

> The principal of a school with a large ESL population has made a point of focusing his staff's attention on student learning by developing his own and the school's ability to analyze student data, and by basing plans for improving student learning on evidence of that learning. Because the state's analyses of disaggregated student test data is released too late to be useful for school planning, the principal found district staff who could do this analysis much earlier in the year and make it available to assess learning progress for the school as a whole, for each grade level, and for individual classrooms. He also collects district, school, and student data to identify areas where improvement is needed. By disaggregating the data in several ways, the principal is able to focus attention on the full range of students in the building, from the ESL magnet population to the gifted and talented program population, and others in between.[20]

These leaders are simultaneously informing themselves about what students are learning in their respective institutions and sending strong messages to others about it. They are focusing attention on learning and on particular aspects of learning, and they are communicating these messages through actions as well as words.[21]

Underlying ideas and values

Given the generally decentralized organization of schools and districts and their mandate to serve a pluralistic public, a clear, shared focus on anything (let alone student learning) is not the natural state of affairs. Teachers can emphasize different things once the classroom doors are closed, and administrators' energies can be consumed by a thousand distractions. In their preoccupation with the daily work of managing a district, a school, or a classroom, participants can easily lose sight of learning. Understandably, it is natural for them to use crude proxies like aggregated test scores to suggest what and how much learning is taking place.

Leaders are in a position to alter that state of affairs, by declaring a focus on learning—or by orchestrating a process whereby their colleagues and other stakeholders develop such a focus. Furthermore, their focus is not just on learning as a general goal, but on learning that is powerful and equitable.

Leaders are better able to establish and sustain a learning focus when they hold a fundamental set of values and norms about learning that they share with other educators. Especially in settings where students have been historically underserved, beliefs and commitments to particular core values appear to play a central role.[22] Writers who have probed the "transformational" character of educational leadership and its moral, cultural, and symbolic dimensions, underscore the crucial role the leader's beliefs can play.[23] These values become the foundation for learning improvement:

- **Ambitious standards for student learning.** A high level of understanding and skills in critical subject areas is essential.[24]
- **Belief in human capacity.** Students can meet ambitious learning standards if they have effective instruction and support.[25]
- **Commitment to equity.** Achievement gaps among students who differ by class, race, ethnicity, and language must be narrowed and ultimately eliminated.[26]

- **Belief in professional support and responsibility.** Teachers and administrators must share responsibility and hold one another accountable for improving educational quality and equity.[27]
- **Commitment to inquiry.** Using evidence to evaluate and change practice is essential to continuous improvement of teaching and learning.[28]

Essential tasks for leaders

At both school and district levels, leaders' efforts to focus attention on powerful, equitable learning involve the following four tasks:

1. **Making learning central to their own work.** In other words, leaders find ways to focus on both learning in general and on particular aspects of student learning (e.g., how well certain kinds of students are learning, what is being learned in particular subjects or grade levels). Leaders do so as learners themselves and make their learning public.
2. **Consistently communicating the centrality of student learning.** Leaders tell and show others repeatedly that learning and particular aspects or areas of student learning are the shared mission of students, teachers, administrators, and the community.
3. **Articulating core values that support a focus on powerful, equitable learning.** Leaders express and model values that will support a challenging, appropriate education for all.
4. **Paying public attention to efforts to support learning.** Leaders take time to observe teaching and other forms of learner support, and to interact with teachers and other professionals about their practice.

Leaders whose actions reflect these principles, and do so in relation to a few learning goals while minimizing potential distractions, seem especially likely to bring about system-wide improvement.[29]

What it looks like in schools.[30] To establish a persistent, public focus on learning at the school level, principals, teacher leaders, and coaches might:

- Regularly visit classrooms and participate in professional learning activities with staff.
- Keep up to date with the field and share their learning with others.
- Initiate and guide conversations about student learning.
- Make student learning a focus for performance evaluation.
- Establish teaching and learning as central topics for school-wide faculty meetings.
- Examine data about student learning and use it for school planning.
- Work with others to set goals for learning improvement and then review progress in relation to these goals.

What it looks like in districts. In addition to doing comparable activities (when they are in the schools), district administrators and professional development staff might also:

- Make it their business to be present in the schools, so they are in a position to see learning in action, and also to influence it.
- Establish procedures for collecting data about student learning, and regularly share it with school staff.
- Make teaching and learning regular topics for district-level administrative meetings.
- Select or develop assessment instruments that are aligned with high standards for student learning.
- Communicate frequently about student learning to parents, the community, and media.
- Make contributions to student learning a primary reference point for district decisionmaking, resource allocation, and personnel evaluation.

Process and challenges

In seeking to establish a focus, leaders encounter competing interests and difficult questions. Issues arise concerning what is most important to learn, who determines the learning focus, what counts as learning, and how much to focus on teaching behaviors. The essential work of leadership includes resolving the underlying issues in ways that are morally and politically defensible.

Learning what? In building consensus around the need to improve and specific goals for improvement, leaders inevitably are forced to address conflicts over competing interests, learning priorities, and beliefs about education. In a number of prominent cases, districts are making the learning of particular subjects—especially literacy, but also mathematics—the focus of attention, on the rationale that these subjects are foundational for most others (and also that these are given greatest weight in state assessment and accountability systems).[31] The following example illustrates a school-level effort to keep the working life of the school focused:

> School staff at one midwestern urban elementary school have a clear sense of their school's goals. They perceive that all of the programs and systems in place at the school help move them toward those goals. The school's principal explains this focus by frequently saying, "We keep it simple." The school's highest priority is their literacy initiative. The principal made it clear that all instructional staff, regardless of their particular assignment (PE teacher, bilingual staff, etc.), will work to teach literacy within their adopted framework. All staff have been trained to work together on literacy goals, and also to share common instructional practices, learning tasks, and activities, and to use common achievement measures. In consideration of new programs, this school has been careful to take on only what would strengthen the school's improvement momentum—they are wary of anything which might fragment teachers' time and focus.[32]

A corresponding effort has been made at district level in various settings that place high priority on improvement in literacy or other subjects.

While defensible in various ways, the focus on learning literacy means that other subjects get less attention and often fewer resources. So it is for any learning focus—something gets left out. In one prominent case of a district following such a strategy, the laser-like focus on literacy put an urban systemic reform grant from the National Science Foundation in jeopardy, and ultimately caused the Foundation to withdraw its funding. The district's

leaders were unapologetic: the science grant made too many demands on the system that, in their view, would dilute the attempt to improve literacy teaching.[33] Needless to say, leaders in such instances face continual pressure to give in to the pressure for equal time, resources, and attention to everyone's priorities. But some degree of focus, whether directed from a district central office or developed in more decentralized ways, seems critical to making headway in many settings, especially low performing schools and districts.[34]

Whose focus? A persistent, public focus on learning often springs from a strong leader's vision, but there are clear political costs, as in this district case:

> Entering a district that had maintained a strong commitment to school-based decisionmaking over more than a decade, a new superintendent made no bones about his particular vision of "good teaching." He modeled active instructional leadership in all the district's schools and engaged principals in a substantial expansion of their instructional leadership roles. Six years into the superintendent's regime, teachers new to the district, who have known no other system, express considerable support for what they perceive as strongly supportive district leadership. Many veterans, however, chafe at the lack of flexibility; they perceive themselves as needlessly restricted and without the curricular autonomy they once enjoyed. While the district continues to perform well on state assessments, unhappiness persists among some staff.[35]

A system-wide focus on learning and particular student learning improvement goals can also result from a process of research, discussion, debate, and negotiation among stakeholders. In such instances, the challenge for leaders is to establish a collective focus on learning without compromises that dilute this focus or that result in oscillation from one focus to the next (e.g., this year we'll do math, next year science). Inherent in commitment to a particular vision of teaching and learning, however derived, is a tension over whether others' visions are valued or acknowledged.

What counts as "learning"? In confronting testing and accountability issues, leaders face fundamental questions concerning how to represent what students know and can do. Though they lack complete control of the measurement of learning, local leaders can still influence how the public perceives standardized test scores and other data that are used to inform instruction. In addition, they can promote other measures that offer a more balanced picture of student accomplishments, thereby counteracting potential inequities in standardized assessment systems, as in this high school:

> The school shifted its entire assessment program to focus on providing meaningful feedback to students and teachers. In addition to the annual standardized assessments, this school has organized a school-wide external examination system for student projects and portfolios. As a culminating project, students present project work or a portfolio that documents evidence of their learning to a panel of external examiners or community judges (experts in the field, members of the local school board, members of the local business and cultural community) who then provide feedback about their work verbally and in writing. Examiners also give the student work a score, and the combination of these scores is used in determining whether students pass to the next grade or graduate. Standardized tests fall to the background of assessments driving student learning at this school.[36]

In this and other ways, leaders can play a critical role in guiding productive responses to the testing and accountability pressures.

Focus on learning or teaching (or both)? Finally, leaders are in a good position to bring learning to the foreground, and keep it there. Even in paying public attention to teaching, leaders can make sure that the ultimate concern remains what students are taking away from instruction.

> A principal in an inner-city elementary school says relatively little to her teachers about the teaching she observes when visiting classrooms. Her focus, instead, is on evidence of student learning, and this becomes the main topic of conversation when she and the teachers she has observed debrief the visit. Without this focus, she finds her staff tend to concentrate on certain teaching behaviors, without verifying that their actions produce learning. By shifting focus to what individuals and groups are learning, the principal's approach helps these teachers probe students' different responses to teaching.[37]

In this and similar cases, the focus on learning does not automatically preclude conversation about teaching practice or technique, but it gives these matters a context and reference point.

2 Building Professional Communities that Value Learning

In many schools and districts, leaders build work cultures in which learning opportunities and mutual accountability for improving instruction persist. By working through teachers in subject departments and interdisciplinary teams, collegial networks across schools, and other organizations in the school or district, leaders establish professional communities that place priority on improving learning and teaching, and support each other in pursuit of this goal.[38] Consider what is taking place in this high school:

> The principal of a high school serving a diverse and relatively low-performing student population adamantly resists watering down standards or curriculum for students. He asserts that what needs to be changed for this population is not the level of expectations, but the kinds and extent of support for students' academic performance. He consistently engages teachers in school-wide conversations about their beliefs concerning their students' abilities, effective teaching practice, and shared responsibility for student achievement. This school has improved consistently both on the state's measures of performance and in meeting their goals for moving a significant percentage of bottom-level students up to higher levels of performance.[39]

What is happening at the central office in this urban district also supports an instructionally focused work culture:

> District leaders treat administrators and staff in the central office as part of a learning community in much the same way that school-level people are encouraged to form and participate in professional communities. Only in that way will the central office conceive of itself as contributing to an enterprise that is fundamentally about learning. To realize this goal, all curriculum directors, professional development staff, and others involved in academic programs or student support meet on a regular basis. Every other week, these staff spend several hours together exploring the nature of good teaching practice and their own efforts to guide improvement in teaching practice (these conversations parallel the regular meeting of all school principals in the district). The participants approach these interactions as learners and try to be explicit about what they are learning about teaching, learning, and learning improvement.[40]

Leaders in sites such as these are engaging professional staff in the difficult job of considering their work and its meaning for student learning. Though the substance of their conversation differs, the participants are taking part in a form of "community" which guides their work and supports it. As members of these communities, leaders help to put in place this aspect of professional infrastructure.

Underlying ideas

Though they work in the same buildings, educators are often remarkably alone in their efforts to educate young people. Norms of privacy, assignment policies, graded school structures, and a host of other forces encourage isolation rather than collaborative engagement in common work.[41] But counter forces are increasingly encouraging joint effort, as professional learning and leadership theories acknowledge the potential power of "professional community" in educators' working lives.[42]

Professional communities that both value and promote learning improvement are harder to realize than current rhetoric would imply.[43] Despite widespread calls for such "learning communities," they are not readily created through restructuring designs or mandates. Only through continued engagement with each other, and struggle to confront the often hidden differences among them, do faculties get beyond "pseudocommunity" to a stage where participants can understand and learn from each other.[44]

Sustaining professional communities requires relationships that are sufficiently formed and stable over time to engender trust; shared values that grow through interaction as well as selection into the community; and, a reason for coming together, such as a task or responsibility that requires collaboration. Leaders have many ways of nurturing these relationships, encouraging the sharing of values that support learning, and structuring joint work for community members to tackle.

Essential tasks for leaders

As suggested by the examples above, the practical work of building professional community involves these essential tasks:

1. **Building trusting relationships among professionals in the school or district.** By valuing others, displaying empathy, and dealing forthrightly with colleagues, leaders help set a tone of mutual trust and respect in their institutions.
2. **Creating structures and schedules that sustain interaction among professionals.** Leaders set the stage for professional learning community by grouping them in ways that encourage collaboration with each other over time (and by recruiting group members in the first place), and by creating regular blocks of time for them to interact.
3. **Helping to frame joint work and shared responsibilities.** Working with professional group members, leaders are in a good position to define tasks that imply or require joint effort by group members.

4. **Modeling, guiding, and facilitating participation in professional communities that value learning.** As participants in professional communities and often guides for collaborative work, leaders show what it means to be part of a viable community (e.g., through questioning, setting norms, sharing intellectual resources).

5. **Promoting a focus on learning and associated core values.** Leaders' own persistent, public focus on learning and commitment to underlying values, discussed earlier, give direction to the professional communities in which they participate.

What it looks like in schools. In operational terms, school leaders can build work cultures around learning in many ways:

- Create structures for regular staff interaction about learning and teaching.
- Set up cycles of school-wide inquiry into learning and teaching performance, and participate in professional inquiry as a colleague.
- Identify and address staff assumptions about norms, values, and beliefs related to learning.
- Recruit teachers who work from a values base consistent with the culture that leaders seek to develop.
- Create opportunities for staff to have voice in decisions about issues related to teaching and learning.
- Celebrate accomplishments in student and teacher learning.

What it looks like in districts. At the district level, administrators and staff can act in similar ways to build professional community among staff within the central office, across schools, and in the broader community of educational stakeholders. Specifically, they can:

- Support assignments and scheduling that enable district staff to work together or that make it possible for individuals from different schools to interact.
- Work with the union to establish provisions for collaborative work among teachers.
- Redefine the work of the central office staff in terms of its relationship to learning improvement.
- Guide a process of inquiry into district-wide organization and performance.
- Take part in professional learning opportunities as a colleague.

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Process and challenges

Building a professional culture that values learning will not happen overnight or by decree, especially in settings with low morale or high stress. In pursuit of professional community, leaders confront a series of issues, concerning basic professional needs, resistance to community, open versus closed communities, and the appropriate response to poor practice.[45]

How well are basic professional needs met? Creating a collaborative and learning-focused work culture may need to start with basic team building that addresses the fundamental need for physical safety and order, establishes positive relationships among professional staff, and develops pride in what the school or district stands for. The entry of a new principal into this urban elementary school tells a familiar story:

> The new principal found a school that was chaotic and disorganized; a sense of constant turmoil pervaded the setting. Fights in the hallways were common. Teachers communicated little with each other or with parents, hoarded scarce supplies rather than sharing them, and projected a general sense of suspicion. The principal knew that nothing good would happen without establishing a sense of order and safety while, at the same time, acknowledging and valuing the hard work that many teachers were doing. She began with immediate and regular communications with staff about the school, their work, and her commitments. Early in this process, she overheard one say, "This is a breath of fresh air that someone recognizes the work that we do." She established and enforced a discipline policy, showed a persistent presence in the hallways and in classrooms, initiated outreach to parents and made personal contact with students (she knew all 300 by name and many of their families as well). Within a year, the stage was set for staff to dig deeper into the quality of their teaching and student performance.[46]

While building a community, however, the work does not stop once basic needs of this sort are met. No matter how good members feel about their working situation, a professional community may contribute little to learning improvement if it is not connected to an agenda for student, professional, and system learning.

Where's the resistance coming from? Resistance among professional staff to community-building efforts is likely to be strong in some settings. For example, prevailing norms may perpetuate teachers working in isolation from one another. The working environment may be fraught with high stress, low morale, high staff turnover, or general resistance to change. Internal power struggles may challenge efforts to build community, as can specialization of staff and inflexibility of procedures. A general lack of understanding or experience with the notion of learning community may also cause resistance. Leaders are put in the position of diagnosing the sources of resistance and opening lines of communication, motivating participation, and providing a workable vision of collaborative effort. To move from "community" to "learning community" takes hard work, trust, and often explicit teaching.

Closed or open communities? While the goal is strong professional communities, not all are open to new ideas, beliefs, or even new members, as research on "communities of practice" has demonstrated.[47] The following community of practice in one urban elementary school helped to insulate this first-grade teacher from new ideas about teaching young people from low-income families to read:

> The teacher's immediate community of practice was a group of first-grade teachers who had worked together for a long time; they saw eye to eye on many things and reinforced each other's thinking about their work. They were generally suspicious of "new educational terms and buzz words, or whatever you want to call them," and took a dim view of the state's and district's efforts to reform their teaching of literacy. Teachers in her community of practice believed that they knew what the children needed. As they saw it, these "south end kids" just weren't up to a demanding curriculum; they needed "the basics." The teachers' mutually reinforcing philosophy acted as buffer to the district's attempts to advance the level of practice and, in effect, limited their ability or willingness to reconsider the effectiveness of their literacy teaching.[48]

This kind of professional community poses a leadership challenge. The ultimate goal is for teachers, working together, to build new knowledge for themselves about improving practice. Reassigning staff to break apart tight, insular groupings may be a necessary step toward that goal. But further steps that establish a desirable vision of good practice and help staff assemble evidence to reach it are also needed.

How to confront poor practice? For professional communities to be a vehicle for improving learning, their members need to be able to scrutinize each others' practice and offer helpful critique. To accomplish this, leaders depend on solid relationships and norms supporting honest, critical exchanges about practice. When created in a viable professional community, strong relationships can enable the hard work of professional improvement, as in this case of an assistant superintendent in an urban district:

> In order for the assistant superintendent to be able to tell principals the "hard stuff" and for the principals to hear it, she feels it is important to have developed a relationship with them. Through a series of interactions, the assistant superintendent communicates respect, caring, willingness to listen, and the message "it's all about the work," which permits her to push individuals to higher levels of performance. Over several visits to a particular school, after hearing the principal mislabel the components of balanced literacy (e.g., calling round-robin reading a guided reading lesson), the assistant superintendent decided it was time to push. She knew the principal wanted to please her and was working hard, so the assistant superintendent was able to combine critique with positive support. Over coffee one day, she said to the principal, "You're fooling yourself; you don't understand this stuff. Let's solve this together because we are not doing our jobs and the kids are being cheated." The principal was devastated, but she took the role of learner and was able to change her leadership practice.[49]

Given healthy relationships, leaders not only help professional communities' members confront poor practice, but also visualize good practice, while building the knowledge base that supports it. Here, leaders find ways to provoke or stretch the thinking of the community, by introducing promising ideas, assembling evidence of what works, and inspiring collaborative effort to solve problems of practice.[50]

3 Engaging External Environments that Matter for Learning

Leaders build relationships with, and secure resources from, groups outside the school or district that can foster students' and teachers' learning. At the same time, leaders are on the lookout for trouble—external pressures, demands, crises, or other events that may preempt or constrain attempts to advance a learning improvement agenda.[51] Engaging external environments means interacting with the local community and other groups in ways that define and create opportunities for learning improvement. Engagement can take subtle forms as educators come to understand the communities in which they work, illustrated by this urban elementary school serving a linguistically diverse population:

> Over three years, two principals and a cadre of teacher leaders worked intensively to develop support for critical conversation about their teaching and the role that race, class, and language background play in it. This activity paralleled aggressive outreach to families in the community through home visits, educational activities for parents, and other means. Building consensus in the school came about through considerable struggle, as school staff confronted conflicts with each other and their preconceptions about the community they were serving. Initially, it was very difficult for participants to connect critical conversation with talk about their instructional practice. Ultimately, the staff worked together to understand what the children's origins in a disenfranchised, linguistically diverse community implied for their practice, as they worked to engage the community in school life.[52]

Or the process can be more overt and wide-ranging, as in this district:

> The district's emphasis on narrowing the achievement gap has resulted in marshalling resources from all sectors of the community. The district's learning acceleration program that offers additional instruction before and after school was first aimed at grades 3 through 8 and then expanded in its second year to grades 1 and 2, then to the high school. District leaders are now seeking support from the business and faith communities so that students can receive help in other areas. Volunteers are trained to be literacy coaches and to start tutorial programs; they have established computer labs in churches and businesses, as well as providing clothing for students in need.[53]

The superintendent and other leaders in this district are proactively seeking connections with local communities. They recognize that the success of their learning improvement agendas depends on how well they establish and manage these connections.

Underlying ideas

Teaching and learning happens in multiple contexts or environments, embedded in one another.[54] Because these contexts influence the interaction of learners, teachers, and content, they become a special concern for leaders, especially those in positions of authority within their respective schools and districts. Consequently, effective leaders seek to understand and use these environments, and when necessary, protect or "buffer" teaching and learning from negative environmental influences. In addition to the immediate organizational context (school or district), three kinds of external environments play important roles in enabling or constraining effective teaching and learning:

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- Family and community environments—which embrace the interests, demands, and resources of parents, advocacy groups, human service agencies, municipal bodies, the media, corporate interests, and taxpayers.
- Professional environments—which include the resources and constraints posed by unions, professional networks and associations, higher education institutions, and the local educator labor market.
- Larger policy environments—which embody state reform policies, federal programs and policies, regulations and requirements. (From the school's point of view, the district is part of the "larger policy environment.")

These environments look very different when viewed from the vantage point of the school and district, as shown in Figures 6a and 6b.

Figure 6a: *School's-Eye View of External Environments that Matter for Learning*

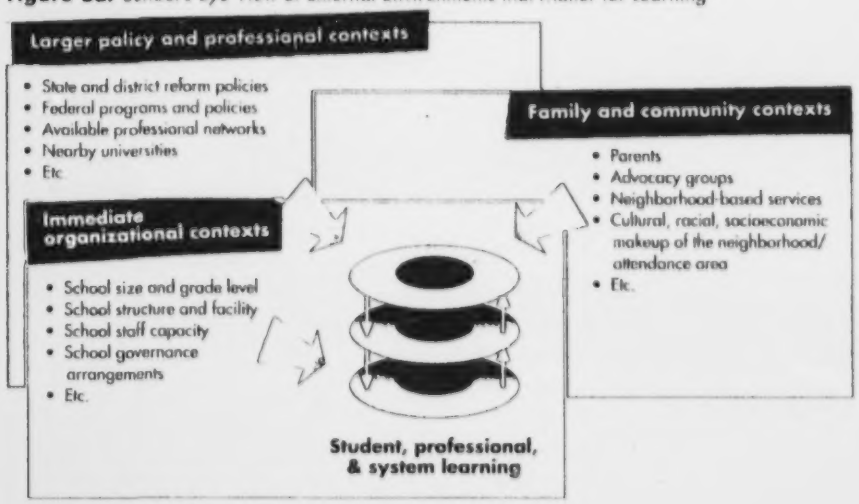
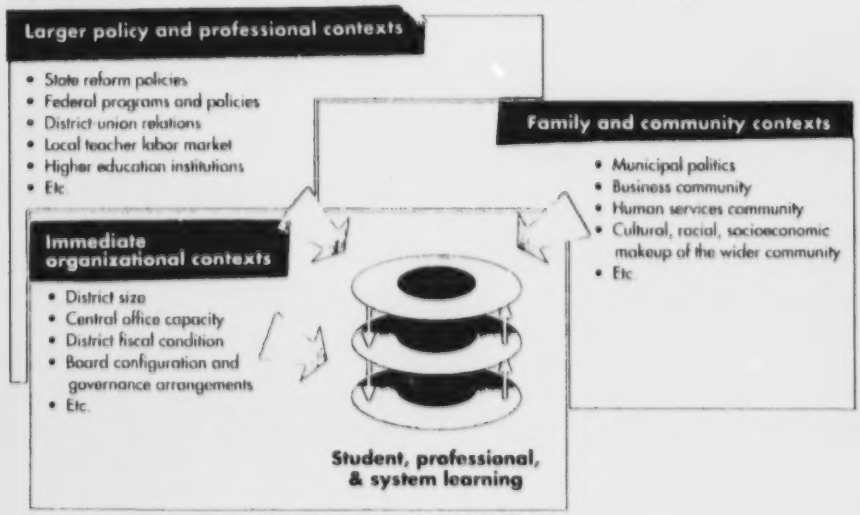

Larger policy and professional contexts
• State and district reform policies
• Federal programs and policies
• Available professional networks
• Nearby universities
• Etc.
Family and community contexts
• Parents
• Advocacy groups
• Neighborhood-based services
• Cultural, racial, socioeconomic makeup of the neighborhood/ attendance area
• Etc.
Immediate organizational contexts
• School size and grade level
• School structure and facility
• School staff capacity
• School governance arrangements
• Etc.
Student, professional, & system learning

Figure 6b: *District-Eye View of External Environments that Matter for Learning*


Larger policy and professional contexts
• State reform policies
• Federal programs and policies
• District-union relations
• Local teacher labor market
• Higher education institutions
• Etc.
Family and community contexts
• Municipal politics
• Business community
• Human services community
• Cultural, racial, socioeconomic makeup of the wider community
• Etc.
Immediate organizational contexts
• District size
• Central office capacity
• District fiscal condition
• Board configuration and governance arrangements
• Etc.
Student, professional, & system learning

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External environments are a source of both constraints and resources.[55] The constraints are likely to preoccupy educators' attention, as dictates "from above," financial crises, political maneuvering, and other outside events that impact districts and schools. But, environments also offer many resources that include more than funding, among them, intellectual resources (e.g., university faculty or professional networks), human resources (e.g., volunteers), political resources (e.g., allies on the city council), and social or cultural resources (e.g., the cultural makeup of the community). Organizations like public schools are completely dependent on their environments for resources such as these and, indeed, for their identity and legitimation as public institutions.[56] The ability to realize learning improvement agendas is therefore intimately linked to environments.

Essential tasks for leaders

Engaging external environments that matter for learning means:

1. **Making efforts to understand community, professional, and policy environments.** Through continual environmental scanning, leaders make it their business to figure out which elements of their environments matter most for learning and teaching.
2. **Building relationships with individuals and groups.** To foster general good will and to support specific aspects of the learning improvement agenda, learning-focused leaders open lines of communication, develop alliances, and form coalitions with whoever has greatest relevance (positive or negative) for the learning improvement agenda.
3. **Anticipating resistances and devising ways to manage conflict.** Leaders engage in the political work of neutralizing resistance, heading off attacks, or strategically confronting external resistances when it makes sense to do so.
4. **Garnering the full range of resources (fiscal, intellectual, human, etc.) that support the learning agenda.** Leaders work with those elements of their external environment that can offer significant resources to particular aspects of the learning improvement agenda.

What it looks like in schools. School leaders can interact with environments that can support (or inhibit) learning wherever their position gives them access. For example, they may:

- Visit families and community groups to explain the instructional program and learning agenda.
- Establish educational opportunities for community members and otherwise serve parent and community needs.
- Draw in potential critics by involving them in the school improvement process.
- Develop allies in the central office and proactively seek support for student and professional learning goals.
- Form partnerships with neighborhood groups focused on improving learning, particularly those groups with traditionally limited voice.

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What it looks like in districts. Given their exposure to a wider array of external environments, district administrators and staff may be in a good position to engage potential friends or critics. For example, they may:

- Educate school board members in building an improvement agenda and engage them as part of a district learning community.
- Promote the student and professional learning agenda with the media and influential community groups.
- Join forces with community-based leaders who care about the quality of learning and teaching.
- Develop allies at the state level and use these contacts to increase flexibility and instructional resources.
- Strategically use external requirements and resources to advance a local learning agenda.
- Form partnerships with civic or professional bodies that focus on learning improvement.

Process and challenges

Building positive relationships with external groups and responding effectively to outside pressures and conditions compounds the work of school and district leaders. Given all that must be attended to inside their respective organizations, it is hard to know where and how much energy to invest externally, and how to make it pay off for learning.

Reactive or proactive? It is likely that a proactive approach to external environments, though initially time-consuming, may be the best way to head off the need to respond to external events in a reactive way later on. The following district case illustrates:

> A new superintendent set out to build support for his troubled urban school district by assuming the role of "marketeer"—to convince the community that great things were happening in their public schools. Initially, he held community meetings to hear what the public perceived as good and what needed to be improved in the schools. Then, to appeal to the business community, he and his staff created a business plan focused on specific, achievable measures, which he talked through with anyone and everyone who would listen. He approached the media and was soon marketing the schools on television, radio, in newspapers, and in speeches. The free coverage continued, from news articles to billboards and daily faxes to local businesses. The superintendent noted, "I knew we were beginning to have the 'saturation' effect we wanted when taxi drivers, waitresses, parking attendants, and business executives began stopping me to say how excited they are about what our school system is doing for children." In due course, the public schools' nonprofit fundraising arm was able to generate large sums of money, volunteer help, and good will to support the public school—resources which had not been forthcoming prior to this superintendent's efforts.[57]

This apparent success in developing commitment to public education is notable since, too often, municipal politics, a hostile union, economic crises in the community, or organized opposition to reform overwhelm leaders' best efforts. Had this superintendent not seized the initiative, he would likely have had to spend equal or greater time reacting to the external pressures that these kinds of events would ultimately bring.

Reach out or draw in? Often characterized as "outreach," engagement with external environments can be more of a two-way process that brings external participants, resources, and ideas into the schools, while acknowledging the presence of environmental conditions in teaching and learning. Drawing in participants and resources can substantially alter the character of schools, as in this instance:

> An elementary principal garnered support from the ESL coordinator at the district office and from local social service agencies to develop a family learning center on the school site. This learning support center has several computers, is open daily, and is staffed by a home/school coordinator. Families use the facility as a center for parent education, a way to get help for their children (e.g., through tutoring and homework assistance), and a place to access information about health and other issues. In response to a relatively large immigrant population, the center also conducts ESL classes for parents at night, plus there are bilingual tutors who are able to address language-related learning issues.[58]

This programmatic response to community conditions has substantially changed the way this school relates to the community it serves. The changes rested on a clear understanding of the makeup and resources of the community, as well as commitment to bringing these into an expanded picture of the "school community."

How to keep leaders and improvement agendas alive? In schools or districts that often face turbulent environments, the relationship with external environments can be a matter of survival for individuals in school or district leadership roles. This is most intensely felt in relations between superintendents and the school boards that hire them, which tend to reflect the general political landscape of the communities they represent (at least where boards are elected).[59] District leaders who manage to work with boards productively are able to define their respective roles appropriately (e.g., minimizing the board's role in micro-managing the daily work of the district) and to focus attention on a common learning improvement agenda. In one such instance, the urban district and board found common cause in addressing a pattern of unacceptably low performance:

> In this city district, data about low graduation rates and student performance (state and local testing revealed less than half of all students meeting state standards) prompted the board and other community groups to demand action. The chamber of commerce, in particular, was adamant that it could not endorse another tax levy if the district was performing this poorly. District leaders immediately set about building a partnership with the chamber and a local community foundation. The result of their collaboration was, initially, a set of performance indicators that could be used to specifically define what students and schools should be accomplishing and to establish a clear basis for accountability. This step began a process of rebuilding trust in the schools and a base of local support for levy proposals.[60]

This is but one form of external pressure on districts and schools, in this instance, providing the impetus for reform. At least as frequently, external groups oppose or resist leaders' attempts to advance a learning improvement agenda. Parents who believe the plans ignore their children's needs or disagree with the improvement focus may balk. Teacher unions may see the improvement strategies as a threat to the teachers' contract or their power base. Community members who believe that the attempts to improve learning undermine their interests or values may also resist. In one case, district and school leaders needed to take strong action to head off a challenge to the upgrading of mathematics instruction in the high school.

> The high school math department's pilot of a new curriculum, which was more closely aligned to the demanding state standards, ran into concerted opposition from the community, especially from parents whose children had been through a difficult adoption of a nontraditional math curriculum in the elementary grades. The process was compounded by the pilot teachers' early struggles to master the new curriculum, which was a big departure from their familiar approach to math teaching. Both school and district leaders got into the act, extending the one pilot year to two (an unusual move in this district). Issues which were actually individual (e.g., between the teacher and a particular student) were kept contained at the individual level, rather than being allowed to become pretexts for a sweeping rejection of the new curriculum. In addition, leaders sought to explain to parents repeatedly the nature of the new program, the rationale for adopting it, and its relationship to the district's goal of closing the achievement gap.[61]

Leading for learning means searching for ways to make a learning agenda "good politics." Today's critics can become tomorrow's allies in furthering an improvement plan. School and district leaders' best hope for neutralizing resistance or turning it into support is to proactively engage relevant external groups.

4 Acting Strategically and Sharing Leadership

The leadership actions discussed so far (establishing a learning focus, building professional community, and engaging external environments) still beg the question of how leaders can exert specific influences on the interaction of teachers, learners, and content. Part of the answer is evident in this school:

> Aided by a small Comprehensive School Reform grant, the faculty and principal created a comprehensive plan that combined multiple interventions, each devised by a separate faculty task/study group. The groups took on different facets of a collective task to improve mathematics and literacy learning in the school. The first group came up with ways to reach out to the community. A second group reviewed the rigor and relevance of the curriculum and tried to correlate it to a set of best practices derived from literature and from exemplary teaching in the school. A third worked on homework issues and created a school-wide homework policy. A fourth considered how to maximize planning time for teachers, emphasizing classroom visitations and collaborative work on curriculum. A fifth group looked more specifically at how the math and language arts curriculum could be better aligned with state and district standards. These activities, facilitated by both the principal and teacher leaders, were used in the development of a strategic plan.[62]

While only one step toward learning improvement, leaders at this school are addressing their learning goals by mobilizing effort along multiple pathways that lead directly to student, professional, or system learning.

Underlying ideas

Leading for learning strategically involves devising courses of action that use existing policies, support activities, management structures, and leadership resources to create improved learning opportunities for students, teachers, and the system.[63] The essential ideas are that these leadership actions are strategic and distributed, and that they utilize multiple pathways of influence on learning.

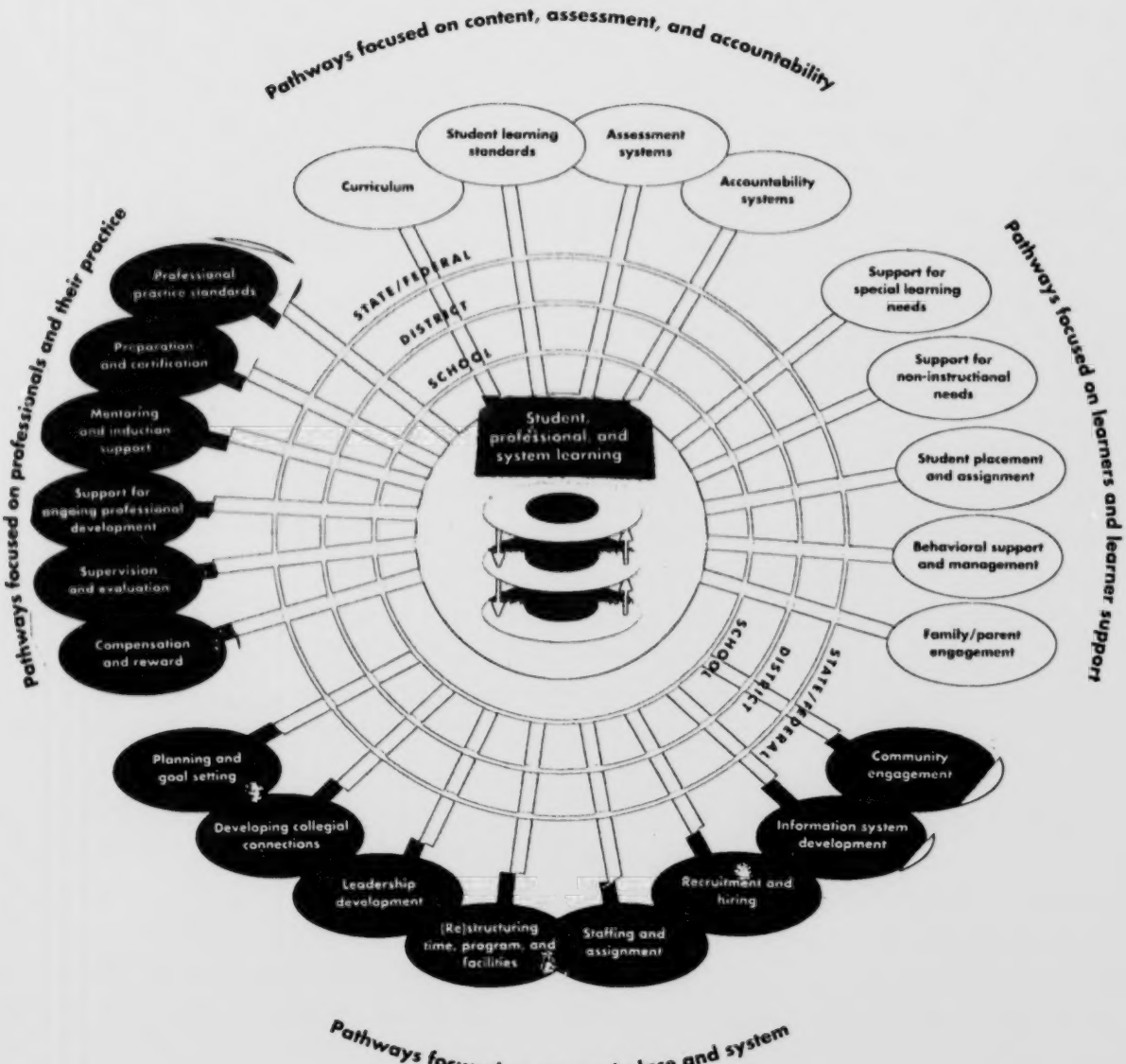
To be "strategic," leaders' actions must first align with the focus on learning that leaders have established. Second, they are sensitive to the local context and responsive to the most critical learning issues that arise in this site at this time. Third, they exploit opportunities that present an opening for change and afford the possibility of maximum leverage over the situation. Thus, in a district with high turnover among teachers, actions aimed at new teacher support (induction programs, mentoring, etc.) along with school leadership development and other workplace supports might be an especially opportune target for leadership.

Strategic action by this definition naturally implies a sharing of leadership among different kinds of staff. One of the things that makes opportunities ready for action is the presence of individuals who can—or can be helped to—take on leadership responsibility. Leadership is thus "distributed" when leaders operating from different vantage points in the system—some in formal positions of authority, some not—address related aspects of a commonly held learning improvement agenda.[64] The concept implies more than delegation; it connotes sharing of values and an integration of effort in pursuit of school or district goals.

Strategic, distributed action is most likely to influence learning itself when it stimulates and supports activities that have a direct, intrinsic relationship with learning and teaching. For example, in the case noted above, induction and mentoring are activities that lead directly to the teacher (here, new and inexperienced teachers) and provide them with advice, critique, and resources for developing their professional competence. The induction and mentoring function cuts across levels in the system: a stream of activities is involved, from state policies and programs supporting the mentoring of new teachers, to corresponding programs and resources at district level, to school-level use of mentors, and to the ongoing interaction of teachers with their mentors, which ultimately contributes to professional learning. The full stream of activities we refer to as a "pathway to learning."

There are many such pathways, shown schematically in Figure 7. All converge on student, professional, and system learning. Some pathways target content and assessment, others the support of learners, and still others professionals and their practice. A further set of pathways get at learning more indirectly by aiming at the workplace or system as a whole. Each exists, whether or not leaders choose to act along them, and each offers a potential avenue for leaders at various levels of the system to influence teaching and learning. The act of leadership is to select from among the many possibilities the pathways with the greatest leverage over learning.

Figure 7: *A Range of Pathways*



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Essential tasks for leaders

Acting strategically and sharing leadership means these three tasks:

1. **Identifying or creating pathways that have the greatest influence.** Leaders search among the possible pathways for a set, generally more than one, that have high potential to influence the interactions of students, teachers, and content—at this time, in this setting.
2. **Mobilizing effort along more than one pathway.** Along selected pathways, leaders allocate resources, guide activity, and otherwise "make things happen."
3. **Helping others assume and exercise leadership.** Leaders find and support individuals occupying different positions at both school and district levels, who have the potential to guide, direct, and support others' learning.
4. **Mobilizing support for activity along multiple pathways.** Both internally and externally, leaders build a base of acceptance, interest, and resources for improvement activities.

What it looks like in schools. In schools, strategic, distributed action can take many forms, depending on the learning improvement focus and the particulars of the site. Principals, teacher leaders, coaches, and others may:

- Identify pathways that address aspects of students and teachers work that are demonstrably weak and ready for improvement.
- Locate and draw on staff expertise in developing school improvement initiatives.
- Create positions that share instructional leadership with the principal.
- Link student support activities with efforts to mentor and support teachers.
- Consider curriculum and instruction issues alongside workplace improvement.

What it looks like in districts. Once again, depending on improvement focus and site particulars, district leaders might:

- Support the development of school-level leadership aimed at learning improvement.
- Evaluate district curriculum and assessment policies and their ability to promote student and teacher learning, and revise them to meet the improvement agenda.
- Set up policies and programs to address student learning needs related to the learning agenda.
- Use national and state teacher policy initiatives to build teacher leadership and local strategies for improving instruction.
- Develop policies, in collaboration with teacher leaders and unions, that provide teachers with time and resources to act on district and school improvement plans.

Process and challenges

To fashion strategies for exerting specific influence on student, professional, or system learning raises questions for leaders regarding where to start, who exercises initiative, and how initiative is shared between school and district.

Where to start? With so many possible courses of action available to them, school and district leaders face a major strategic puzzle. What will give them traction in addressing the learning improvement agenda? No single answer to the question applies equally well in all settings. In essence, the answer is to start somewhere that relates to the learning focus, taking full advantage of local circumstances, events, and leadership resources. External mandates may set the stage, as in this case:

> Seizing on an external mandate that encouraged the use of portfolios in assessing students' work, the district put together a yearlong series of workshops that encouraged schools to create a portfolio of standard-bearing work for every child. Teacher leaders from each school were invited to these workshops and expected to become the in-school experts on the use of portfolios and related assessment techniques, including the creation of explicit rubrics regarding standard-bearing work. These ideas were simultaneously introduced to principals and became a focus of school visits by district staff. Teachers had different responses to this innovation, some concluding that rubrics were a useful tool for assessment and instruction and trying to create them. Others felt that traditional grading was a sufficient representation of students' work quality, but by year's end, many teachers had altered their classroom assessment practices.[65]

In this instance, leaders saw an opportunity along the assessment pathway to bring additional support for their vision of individually differentiated instruction. This case illustrates how leaders, taking advantage of external assessment pressures, engaged others in inquiry into assessment methods and encouraged many teachers to reconsider their classroom assessment practices. They did so by combining activity along multiple pathways (assessment, professional development, accountability, and leadership development). Through a combination of persuasion, modeling, strong-arming, resource allocation, and other inducements, these leaders moved the district toward a broader repertoire of student assessments and ways of using evidence to improve educational practice.

Who leads? Strategic, distributed action implies finding people who are in a position to mobilize and sustain effort in pursuit of the learning improvement agenda and who are willing to assume this responsibility. In the example above, district leaders involved teacher leaders who were positioned to persuade their colleagues to think critically about useful and preferred forms of classroom-based assessment. Effective leaders at the school level understand both the issue and the potential for many to exercise leadership, as noted by this principal:

> Principals don't have enough time to be involved in all the decisions, so we have to disaggregate the jobs and fit them where they go. Consequently, every staff person in this school has some form of leadership role. For example, we have grade-level leaders, and during our grade-level meetings, they assume a leadership role in making sure the agendas are organized and the work that needs to be done progresses. We also have content leaders in science, technology, mathematics, literacy, and social science. There are many different leadership roles that function across the school.[66]

District or school initiative? An extension of the distribution of leadership involves how the learning improvement agenda is shared between school and district. Extremes in either direction may compromise learning improvement. For instance, leadership in centralized systems, exercised too aggressively from the "top" of the system, may disempower teachers and provoke counter reactions in the schools. At the other extreme, decentralized districts that transfer most instructionally related leadership to the schools may risk substantial unevenness and inequities among schools. A solid middle ground exists, however, in which school and district leaders take joint responsibility for learning improvement, develop goals and their respective roles, and mobilize effort accordingly.[67]

5 Creating Coherence

Critical to leading for learning is finding ways to develop a sense of clarity and coherent support for the improvement of instruction. When leaders stimulate and guide activity along multiple pathways, two questions arise: How well are the activities linked to one another? How effectively do they connect student, professional, and system learning? The case below illustrates one answer to these questions:

> A middle school uses biweekly, two-hour faculty study groups to examine samples of student work for evidence of learning progress and areas of need, and to identify future instructional steps to take with particular students or groups of students. In these sessions, staff are learning about high-quality student work as well as planning ways to make that happen in classrooms. Nothing is allowed to interfere with this standing commitment. Each study group posts a public record of their work, to which the principal provides feedback, questions, and affirmation. In addition, study groups report their progress and evidence of student learning improvement to the whole staff at staff meetings. Student achievement is steadily increasing.[68]

Here, activity along multiple pathways focuses on all three learning agendas: student learning, by considering special learning needs and the quality of particular students' work; professional learning, by engaging faculty in study groups to learn about their students' learning, and by getting ideas for better teaching; and system learning, by generating data and insight into school performance, shared publicly with other staff and school leaders. The activities bring coherence to learning improvement through mutually reinforcing connections among the three learning agendas.

Over a longer span of time, coherence manifests itself in a set of understandable and mutually reinforcing conditions surrounding teachers' and learners' work, as in this district:

> The district, known initially in a large metropolitan region as a "dumping ground" for low-performing teachers, created a "teaching quality" improvement strategy that featured active recruitment, extensive mentoring, explicit teaching standards, and support for the ongoing work of the teaching corps, as well as opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles. Ultimately, these were linked to a new set of student learning standards. Patiently developed over a period of years, this strategy provided the foundation for a transformation in this district's performance and ultimately in its image.[69]

Underlying ideas

The actions of leaders, in combination with other conditions of schooling, present learners and teachers with a set of messages about their work that vary in coherence. Initially applied to systemic reform policies, the concept of coherence has several layers of meaning.[70] At one level, it refers to alignment—among activities on different pathways and between these activities and the resources needed to carry them out. The more aligned, presumably the more coherent. At another level, coherence concerns the goal for alignment—its link to a compelling vision of learning and teaching that teachers understand and accept. At a third level, coherence implies sufficient working consensus so that teachers' efforts to improve student learning are consistent with the efforts of other grade-level teachers, as well as teachers in other grades, and in other district schools. Ultimately, coherence is about sense making: does the work of improving learning and the strategies for achieving that goal makes sense to all participants?

The quest for coherence takes place against a backdrop of substantial incoherence in public schooling, especially in larger districts. Many conditions—including staff turnover and the division of labor in a large bureaucracy—have a tendency to diffuse the focus, disconnect one function from another, and make it more difficult to develop working relationships. Environmental constraints further complicate leaders' efforts to build cohesion into the agenda for powerful and equitable student learning. State policies, to take one obvious example, may be at odds with local visions, priorities, and practices. But, promising evidence from a growing number of cases suggests that, even in the face of adverse circumstances, districts can successfully enact coherent reform strategies. Districts that have reorganized themselves into multilayered ("nested") learning communities created an infrastructure that supports students', teachers', and leaders' learning. These have modest to impressive student learning gains to show for their efforts.[71]

Essential tasks for leaders

Creating coherence means:

1. **Utilizing pathways that intentionally address student, professional, and system learning.** Coherence is likely when leaders can forge connections between the learning that happens in classrooms and what professionals are learning (e.g., about their classroom work), and the learning about system performance done by administrators responsible for the system as a whole.
2. **Aligning activities with resources, with each other, and with compelling visions of learning and teaching.** Leaders look for and make operational connections between activities along different pathways, informed by an overarching vision of learning improvement.
3. **Creating structures and incentives for system learning that supports student and professional learning.** With their focus in mind, leaders devise methods for learning about system performance that support student and teacher learning.

What it looks like in schools. School leaders create coherent connections among student, professional, and system learning when they:

- Build professional development around data on student learning.
- Locate professional development in classrooms and in close relationship to particular problems of classroom practice.
- Use inquiry into learning and teaching performance as a basis for ongoing school improvement planning.
- Ensure that goals for learning improvement are consistent with the values shared by the school community.
- Use teacher evaluation and school improvement planning as vehicles to focus on learning goals.

What it looks like in districts. District-level administrators and staff can create coherent improvement efforts when they:

- Communicate persistently with schools and across the central office about learning improvement agendas and how different stakeholders can work together on them.
- Make expert staff available in schools to help with focused improvement efforts.
- Restructure the district professional development function to support curriculum and instructional improvement efforts.
- Develop data that provide information about student learning which can be used in professional development.
- Allocate resources consistently in support of student and professional learning goals.

Process and challenges

Because such a broad span of activities and people may be involved, coherence is often difficult for leaders to achieve. The resistances, already discussed—that relate to establishing a focus, building professional community, and engaging external environments—are among the forces that complicate efforts at creating coherent working environments. Difficult decisions and trade-offs arise concerning the pace of change, the response to environmental turbulence, and the degree of professional autonomy and discretion present potential threats to coherence.

All at once or incrementally over time? There is a temptation for the pace of reform to move faster than schools and teachers are ready to internalize it. If there is any lesson from sites that narrowed their focus and stuck to it over a period of years, it is that deep change in any aspect of the instructional program is a long-term matter. In one well-documented case, an urban district's campaign to instill balanced literacy teaching in the district's elementary and middle schools stretched across 10 years and more; only late in that time period did a second subject area (mathematics) become a part of the district's strategy. A by-product of the continuing focus on literacy was the district's ability to project and reinforce a stable set of messages and support for more powerful forms of literacy instruction. Whether or not teachers agreed with these messages (some didn't and left), they were clear and consistent. The district's approach to reform had considerable coherence.[72] The trade-off, however, was that other subject areas were not given as much attention or support. But had the district

sought to address other subjects all at once, there would have been some risk to the coherence of the messages the teachers were receiving, not to mention their sense of being able to make all the desired changes.

How much autonomy and discretion to allow? A second trade-off emerges from the case just described: other valid approaches to literacy teaching were not honored in the same way as the set of ideas and techniques embraced by the district's vision of balanced literacy. In effect, in its quest for a coherent approach to reform and professional practice, the district limited professional autonomy at the same time that it sought to boost professional competence. While the trade-off may have been worth it in this case, there may be a temptation to equate coherence with control. Alternative scenarios can be imagined, in which the reform theory of action places greater emphasis on school-level invention, initiative, and discretion. If these values are consistently promoted and supported, a different form of coherence is possible, in principle, as the following case suggests:

> An urban district made considerable progress in improving the performance of its 50,000 students over recent years with an explicit attempt to empower schools and encourage entrepreneurial activity at the school level. Schools were given budgetary control and a lot of latitude in hiring, and encouraged to develop professional development strategies as part of school-specific "transformational" plans. The overall direction for schools' work is guided by a district-wide set of student learning standards and teaching practice standards. Many schools have responded and, with variations, progress is being made. But schools are not always sure what messages the central office is sending; professional development dollars allocated to the school, for example, were to be used to purchase services only from the district office, which tried to configure itself as a provider of these services. Yet it didn't always have the requisite expertise or offer what the schools were looking for. Some school-level initiatives were stymied as a result.[73]

In this case, some coherence has developed at district level around a more decentralized approach to improving student learning. But at the ground level, this was not always experienced as coherent in that some details of the district's approach send contradictory messages. Whatever the theory of action, leaders must struggle with some basic tensions between the purpose and direction they impart and professionals' willingness to pursue that path.

What about forces beyond educators' control? Coherence, or the attempt to achieve it, can clearly be threatened by other circumstances. No amount of careful planning or environmental scanning will head off major, unpredictable events in the often turbulent world surrounding schools and districts that disrupt best-laid improvement plans. As a consortium of professional development organizations providing instructional leadership to a group of partner schools in a major city district discovered, the changing city environment could substantially alter the coherence of their strategies as they were implemented in schools:

> The professional development consortium had built a strategy emphasizing student centered practice in alignment with the district's curriculum and policy stance, only to find that a sudden change in district leadership, accompanied by governance changes and new pressures in the city, led to an abrupt turnaround in policy. Where once it had embraced student-centered practice and related approaches to professional development, the district shifted to a strict accountability strategy tied to basic skills testing, with heavy consequences for schools (and principals) that continued to exhibit low performance. Partner schools responded by retreating from forms of teaching that they feared would not be captured well in the testing program. The consortium dealt

> with the situation by becoming "strategic intermediaries" between district pressures and the schools' practice. It reached out aggressively to sympathetic elements of the central office and to important constituencies outside the district (e.g., the mayor's office); at the same time consortium staff worked with school staff to help them visualize responses to accountability pressures that went beyond ratcheting up the test score bottomline. Within a year, principals and teachers in the partner schools had begun to see new possibilities in inquiry-based teaching, among them, that it could help students do better on tests while learning valuable habits of mind.[74]

In this instance, leaders were able to overcome a major environmental turbulence in ways that furthered their original learning improvement agenda. School and district leaders are not always so fortunate or able to accomplish this effect. But their best hope lies in combining astute environmental engagement with attempts to help participants make productive sense of changing conditions. The act of leadership is to help participants see in crises the seeds of new growth.

Ultimately, coherence emanates from the way leaders' actions across the five areas map on to each other. School and district leaders can seek to achieve coherence, initially, by focusing persistently and publicly on learning and, subsequently, in ways that link activities along and between pathways. In the process, leaders can develop linkages by creating teams and other mechanisms for encouraging dialogue, expectations, and support for collaborative work, all greatly enhanced by having built strong professional communities. Judicious engagement of external environments in support of these efforts solidifies the infrastructure surrounding the learning improvement agenda and may forestall many adverse circumstances. Over time, the result can be a consistent set of activities and resources focused on the task of improving teaching and learning.

PART II
Leading for Learning in School and District Contexts

Part II provides a more detailed discussion of the ideas introduced earlier, applying the concepts presented in Part I to illuminate leadership and learning connections in varied school and district contexts. The extended examples that follow—two focused on individual schools and two on school districts—are an effort to apply the framework as a means to understand particular leadership actions occurring in these contexts over a period of years, aimed at the improvement of learning. The framework tools and ideas highlight the strengths, strategies, and coherence in leadership work, as well as illustrate the evolution of work over time. As the stories unfold, the link between the conceptual ideas from Part I and practical actions taken by leaders in these contexts becomes clear. These underlying concepts are pointed out in the left margin beside their related action. The stories highlight potential insights for those inside schools and districts who may be asking: "How do we begin? What do we do? Where do we go from here?"

Leading for Learning in School Contexts

The two cases that follow offer extended images of school leaders who are seeking to improve learning and also responding to particular needs in context. The cases emphasize various leadership vantage points and pathways of influence suggested in this *Sourcebook*. The cases underscore the interconnectedness of different learning agendas—student, professional, and system—and show how work centered on any one of these crosses over to the others. In no two successful schools does learning-focused leadership operate exactly the same way. Leadership is bound up in context: its approaches to improving learning differ in emphasis, and they leverage different strategies. Framework ideas illuminate how each of these schools works to connect leadership action and learning in context.

Case 1

Manchester High School: Distributing Leadership to Improve Student Learning

For most of its 50-year history, Manchester High School (pseudonym) had the reputation as the lowest-performing high school in its mid-sized suburban district.[75] Significant improvements in a failing school don't happen overnight. It took more than 10 years of teacher-driven reform efforts to transform it from one of the surrounding region's lowest performers to an academically rigorous institution. Manchester now offers students a choice of five

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Underlying Concepts:

theme-based academies—including a challenging freshmen academy and junior/senior academies in communications, environmental studies, engineering, and leadership—as well as a more traditional program.

Manchester's student population, while basically unchanged demographically, is outperforming often-wealthier peers at neighboring schools on national, state, and district assessments. The school's reform plan focused on four design principles—personalization, instruction, support, and the creation of a learning community. Implementing this plan led the school to become a nationally recognized leader in project-based learning, integrated curricula, applied technology, and professional development. Academy students take classes with the same teachers and peers for two years; the close relationships developed across this time provide personalized support that is key to student success. Manchester demonstrates a strong multi-year trend of improved student achievement across a range of indicators and a high degree of teacher and student satisfaction. The school's enrollment is just under 1,000 students; the school's student population is 82% Caucasian, 2% African American, 1% Native American, 6% Hispanic, 3% Asian. The graduation rate at the school is 100%—up from 88% in 1996—and the dropout rate is zero. The average daily attendance rate is 98%—up from 92% in 1993. More than 80% of students enroll in college. Rigorous requirements to attend state universities are met by three-fifths of the students—up from two-fifths in 1993.

How did Manchester drastically improve student learning outcomes? Where did they begin? Over time, what leadership action spurred efforts to improve learning?

Areas of Action

- Coherence
- Strategic action along multiple pathways

While never a simple story, reform in a comprehensive high school is a particularly messy and complex endeavor. Manchester's story involves leadership and funding changes at the school and district levels, distribution of leadership among teachers, parents, and administrators; instructional and structural reforms to improve student learning opportunities, hiring and induction, facilities improvement, and a conscious focus on communicating the school's vision with staff, students, parents, community, school district, and the wider public.

The original impetus for change at Manchester came from an unpopular, top-down district mandate in the early 1990's. Fed up with chronic low performance at Manchester, the superintendent at the time sent a private foundation with a specific program to help save the school. The result was the establishment of a small school-within-a-school program called the School for Integrated Studies that was facilitated by outsiders. Many veteran staff and school leaders responded negatively. The mandated program experienced some success within itself, but the influence did not spread as funders had hoped, because of the conflict around the imposed reform.

When the district hired a new superintendent and the school hired a new school principal, there was plenty of room for change. The new principal, Bob Perkins (pseudonym), brought a 26-year history as teacher and assistant principal at one of the more prestigious high schools in the district. His prior experience carried positive respect with teachers. He entered the job with a determined learning focus—to help Manchester staff and students meet or exceed learning levels of other high schools. The new superintendent approached leadership as a shared enterprise, taking a less "top-down" stance than the previous administration. The superintendent sought ways to support Manchester's existing reform projects and to build on the new principal's commitments to excellence for the school.

Underlying Concepts:

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning
- Leadership sharing across levels

From few pathways to many

While the framework attempts to paint a comprehensive picture of the conceptual building blocks of learning-focused leadership, getting there requires leaders to first figure out where and how to start. In the Manchester case, as in many school renewal efforts, structural changes provided a place to begin. Early efforts by Perkins to heal a rift in the faculty led to a growing consensus around important beliefs about students, learning, and professional relationships. Over time, leadership exercised along multiple pathways made a difference.

Around the time of leadership transition, the school received additional funding from the state, due to a revised funding formula, and from other grants. At first, they focused some of this added funding on structural reforms like scheduling and improving the school facility and grounds. At the same time, however, principal and teacher leaders began to focus on the long-term, systemic goals: improving instruction and student learning opportunities, and distributing leadership.

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning
- Building professional community

Upon arrival, Perkins recognized a rift between a subgroup of staff who were and were not involved in the integrated studies movement (which experienced student success through an instructional approach featuring small groups and project-based learning). Very early on, he facilitated a staff exercise around the questions: What do you want kids to have when they leave us? What do we teach? What are the ingredients of a good learning experience?" Perkins notes that the goal was to get everybody to agree to some generic idea about good instruction—to realize they had more in common than not, and to resolve the problem of fighting between programs. Within six months of this exercise, and with conscious leadership around these issues, the rift was over.

Perkins and teacher leaders encouraged staff to celebrate the successes in the original School for Integrated Studies. Staff made it their own and worked to spread the notion of personalized learning communities and theme-based instruction. They continued to use the original funding and to seek additional support for the instructional vision the staff had reached in early conversations about what they wanted students to have when they left Manchester.

Pathways
- Hiring & induction
- Supervision & evaluation

Over seven years as principal, Perkins focused heavily on the "relationship triangle" of teacher-student-learning. Having taught for 26 years, Perkins understood the power of high-quality instruction to improve student learning. He emphasized this in hiring and orienting new staff, and in his regular evaluations of the teaching staff. During his tenure, he was able to hire approximately 70% of the teaching staff due to retirements. This allowed him to select and train teachers who were committed to the importance of the relationship triangle.

The teachers Perkins and his staff hired also were committed to creating personalized, integrated learning opportunities for students. The reform that had begun with the initial top-down, foundation-funded project was picked up and spread throughout the school. Academies were set up for juniors and seniors in addition to expanding the integrated program for freshman and sophomores.

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Underlying Concepts:

Building distributed leadership

Consistent with current thinking in the field, the framework underscores the importance of leadership as a distributed force (see discussion in Part I). A failure to pay attention to the need for distributed leadership would likely have eventually resulted in a disappointing ending to the Manchester story. Perkins was a powerful and trusted formal leader; literature on school reform foretells the demise of change efforts when strong formal leadership departs and leaves a vacuum at the top. However, he was wise enough to recognize that the sustainability of learning improvement is predicated on shared ownership and leadership. As learning improvement efforts began to take hold, Perkins strategically took steps to remove himself from the spotlight and build the capacity of those around him to carry the effort forward.

Pathways
- Leadership development
- Support for ongoing professional development
- Developing collegial connections

In order for the focus on instructional improvement to be possible, Perkins and a core group of teachers secured additional grant funding to create time for teachers to meet, plan, and take official leadership roles. Key to the success of their reform, Perkins and his team paid significant attention to building professional community, setting aside time for teachers to lead and to meet. At least eight Manchester staff members were paid as teacher-leaders in addition to site administrators.

Areas of Action
- Sharing leadership across the school

At staff meetings, it is now difficult to tell leader from led. The process of sharing leadership was initiated in the first weeks of Perkins' tenure. One of the first things the principal did was bring the department chairs together to talk about governance. They created one leadership body, displacing two other groups with a long history of conflict. They wrote bylaws in one morning and created the Manchester Leadership Council comprised of the nine department chairs, representatives from parents and students, and classified staff representatives. Over time, they added teacher representatives from each of the instructional initiatives underway at the school.

Areas of Action
- Sharing leadership across the school

It was here that leadership began to be distributed across the school. The principal's role in the Leadership Council was to facilitate meetings but not to vote. His role was defined as the communicator of the vision to the public, the one who helps create space so that others might lead, the liaison with the district superintendent and central office, and the one who reminds the school of the focus on the relationship between the teacher, the student, and student learning through hiring, induction, and evaluation.

Pathways
- Leadership development
- Compensation & rewards

Teacher-leader roles were defined as creating and spreading the vision at the school level, facilitating staff meetings, and helping staff find authentic work to contribute to their place on the continuum of participation in the reform of student learning at Manchester. As one teacher leader noted, "Developing multiple leaders depends on people having something real and authentic to do, and considerable support to do it. You can't just assume a leadership role on top of all your other responsibilities." Through grants and other funding, Manchester prioritized a compensation structure, which included either extra pay or the provision of additional classroom release time to a wide spectrum of teacher leaders. Principal and school leaders saw this investment as having long-lasting positive effects on the way staff work regardless of their official position over time at the school.

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Underlying Concepts:

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning
- Engaging environments (community)

The principal and teacher leaders worked with the staff to develop a vision for improving student learning opportunities and instruction via personalization and theme-based instruction. They then sought support and funding for this vision, by coordinating with district goals and initiatives and by seeking external grant support. Instead of following someone else's reform agenda, they established their own and then consciously communicated it to crucial constituencies.

One teacher leader recounted the emphasis put on how to communicate the vision with the staff. They worked to get it down to the "one-minute version"—to help everyone be able to articulate the vision and direction of where the school was going. They consciously set up opportunities for staff and community to dialogue about the direction—to question, to disagree, to contribute to the movement.

Areas of Action
- Engaging environments (district)

The principal's responsibility included communication of the vision to communities outside of the school, such as the school district. He helped the school tailor its vision to support district goals. While Manchester was supporting district goals for student improvement, it was also guiding district policy and receiving supportive treatment from the district. Teacher leaders received permission for Manchester staff to skip district meetings so they could have school-based time to work on their instructional reforms, for example. Manchester teachers also have affected the district's direction; for example, they were invited to facilitate the district's summer institute for all employees. The district was also supportive in collecting and analyzing data on student achievement for the school.

Enabling student and professional learning through inquiry processes

Contrary to some prescriptive reform programs that view change as a destination rather than an ongoing process, Manchester's approach invites continual renewal and growth. The school has embraced new accountability expectations for learning progress, including an inquiry process designed to promote ongoing improvement of instructional practice through careful examination of data collected at the school.

Learning Agendas
- System learning (school level)

Pathways
- Planning & goal setting
- Accountability

Looking at student data has been a central piece of Manchester's growth over the years. Five years ago, the school staff became involved in a reform program that helped them use data and inquiry to create the "optimal experience for students." Using the support structure and funding from the reform organization, they continued to pursue their vision for improved student learning by using a cycle of inquiry which had them study, plan, act, evaluate, and conserve.

Slowly but surely, as students have experienced greater success at Manchester, it has become a more popular choice for others in the district. The student demographic mix has not changed significantly, however. Manchester staff have managed to create improved student learning opportunities and outcomes for the very type of student who was present during the decades of low-performance. They have done this by explicitly focusing on student learning, instruction, and distribution of leadership.

This high school has transformed a mandated reform program's rocky start to a smoother path by investing heavily over a 10-year period in improving student learning opportunities, improving instruction, and distributing leadership across the staff.

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Case 2 — Falls City Elementary School: Engaging A Community of Leaders

Underlying Concepts:

Efforts to center leadership on the improvement of learning begin with an identifiable catalyst for change. Other examples from research on comprehensive school reform suggest the need for a catalyst, the initial "jump start" that a school community needs to refocus its efforts in service of learning.[76] Leadership for learning doesn't just magically happen without a leader or leadership group demonstrating the will to say "we can do better."

The tale of Falls City Elementary (pseudonym) illustrates what can happen when a community wakes up to the idea that the status quo is not working.[77] At Falls City, a school with almost 90% poverty and 20% English Language Learners (ELL), that realization came in the form of an article in the February 28, 1993, Falls City Herald-Review proclaiming that children in the city's schools were unable to learn and the staff were incompetent. The article detailed the fourth grade students' abysmal CTBS test scores. While this event was a humiliating and demoralizing episode for the school, it served as a catalyst for meaningful and sustained change in what school staff believed about how children learn and how they acted on those beliefs. The community and staff of Falls City Elementary came together to evaluate their failings and challenges, and to identify and build on their strengths.

Areas of Action
- Engaging environments
- Building professional community

Pathways
- Planning & goal setting
- Community engagement

For two years, from 1993-95, an ad hoc collection of staff, parents, central office personnel, and community members surveyed all stakeholders to find out what they believed about children and their learning. The staff formed focus groups and began researching best practices. The parents came together to create the Falls City Site Council and actively participated in the gathering of information and research. From this in-depth self study and review of research, stakeholders came to consensus on a set of core beliefs, a mission statement, and a short list of learning-focused school goals.

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning

Learning Agendas
- Student learning

The beliefs, goals, and mission remain at the center of Falls City. The change brought about by the community's agreement on what they wanted for children has been substantial. Where once, the children, their parents, and the community considered Falls City a low performing school to be avoided at any cost, the school is now known across the state for academic excellence. Students understand that they are capable and can be successful, and they enjoy the many visitors who come to talk to them about how they learn at such high rates. They can articulate strategies and specify what teachers do to help all students learn.

Areas of Action
- Engaging environment (community, city politics)

Parents own the changes in the school because they have been an integral part of articulating the program. The Falls City Site Council now is not only the school's parent decisionmaking body, it is also a sanctioned Falls City Neighborhood Council. In this capacity, parents and community members participate not only in the governance of a district school, but also the broader city government. The Falls City Neighborhood Council is the only neighborhood council that serves both roles in the city. It monitors test scores, discipline referrals, and after-school programs. Parents who once were concerned about sending their children to Falls City now recruit new families to the school. A parent explains the impacts of the changes this way:

Underlying Concepts:

I've been a Falls City parent for around 12 years. I've seen a lot of changes since my oldest daughter (who is now 19) first started school here. There was not much opportunity for parent involvement back then. I was never invited to participate in anything at my daughter's school. There were no family nights, workshops, or extended learning opportunities for children.

As my other three kids started school, I wanted to be more involved, so I volunteered in their classrooms not knowing what to expect. I felt very welcomed by the teachers, the principal, and assistant principal. I was invited to be a part of the Falls City Site Council, and I joined the Parent Educational Assistant Program because it offered parents training in reading and math. This helped me learn to help my kids at home the same way they were being taught at school. I also read and worked with other students in the classroom, and I attended the Title 1 conference. Falls City started an extended learning program to provide homework help after school. The school now has some great family nights and evening workshops including computer classes for adults. I've seen a lot of changes over the years that benefit our community, kids, and adults.

Pathways
- Parent/family engagement
- Community engagement

Where halls were once cluttered with chairs and desks for pulling students out of classrooms for remediation, now the hallway walls are covered with student work that helps visitors learn about the academic pursuits of Falls City students. The front entry invites students and guests to sit on the park bench and chairs under the Title I Distinguished School banner and choose a book from the bookcase to read. If the bench is full, the book nook is just around the corner, outside the library. There, where carts and extra desks used to be stored, now students can sit on sofas and read.

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning

Building professional community at Falls City

The improvement of student learning is inextricably tied to the improvement of the instructional practices carried out by professionals at the school. Through a deep examination of their own assumptions about the challenges facing their children, Falls City teachers began to come together as a professional community, determined to improve their own practice. Falls City teachers have always worked hard. Even in 1992-93 when the CTBS scores were so low, it was not due to staff laziness. However, teachers were not as focused on academic success then, as they are now. If teachers taught mathematics, it included only basic arithmetic or number sense, and instruction was very tied to the textbook. They used basal readers and basic science texts. Then as now, almost all of the students at Falls City lived in deep poverty. Teachers knew that students were not coming to school ready to learn and possessed few of the readiness skills needed to be successful in school. Many parents lacked the skills or time to assist their children with homework. So, the Early Intervention Focus Group and Assessment and Instruction Focus Group began to research instructional strategies and classroom settings that might increase the learning of all children, but especially those from communities of deep poverty.

Pathways
- Support for professional development
- Support for special learning needs
- Assessment systems

The district supported the school by placing a Title I early childhood facilitator at Falls City. This early childhood literacy specialist was an in-building professional developer. She planned lessons, coached, and team-taught with teachers in their classrooms. With her expertise and coaching, primary teachers had their first opportunities to try some of the instructional strategies they had been researching. It was not easy for veteran staff to invite an "expert" into their classrooms. But through examination of student learning data, staff came to recognize it was time to try something different.

Pathways
- Support for professional development
- Student learning standards
- Accountability systems

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Underlying Concepts:

At the same time teachers were beginning to move from reading groups, textbook-based teaching, and "one size fits all" instruction, the state was beginning a reform journey of its own by identifying standards for all students. Fortunately for Falls City, two certificated staff members also played important roles at the state level in defining the standards for reading, writing, and science. These staff members were able to assist their colleagues at Falls City in focusing their research and instructional strategies on what would be needed to assist students in meeting the new state standards.

Areas of Action
- Sharing leadership

Pathways
- Recruitment & hiring
- Support for professional development

As a school community, Falls City decided to use their Title I funding to hire three more instructional facilitators who were content experts in mathematics and literacy with additional education and training in professional development. The philosophy of the Falls City staff moved from targeting a few of the lowest performing students to providing in-depth, in-classroom professional development for all teachers to improve the quality of instruction that all children would receive. Teachers became learners themselves, and as students began to engage in instruction that was more focused on the state standards, their achievement soared.

Areas of Action
- Creating coherence (connecting student, teacher, and system learning)

Pathways
- Assessment
- Curriculum
- Support for professional development

The Falls City staff began researching and writing assessments that informed their instructional decisions. All children in the primary grades were assessed with Concepts About Print or Running Record four times a year. The results of these analytical tools gave teachers and facilitators the information they needed to plan whole group, small group, and individual instruction in reading. Teachers had moved from basal-driven instruction to student-centered instruction. In the 1998-99 school year Falls City received a K-2 reading grant from the state to integrate phonics instruction into kindergarten through second grade classrooms. Teachers, facilitators, and administrators used these dollars for additional professional development on phonics-based literature, letter-sound recognition, word chunk, and direct-instruction phonics materials.

Pathways
- Mentoring
- Support for special learning needs
- Developing collegial connections

At this same time, two Reading Recovery teachers were hired who began direct instruction with the school's most struggling first graders. After two years of this intervention, the number of primary students referred to special education was reduced from an average of eight students each year to no more than one. The literacy facilitators and one of the Reading Recovery teachers spent a year collaborating with the other kindergarten teachers and examining current instructional practices in kindergarten. The Reading Recovery teacher shared the new knowledge she was gaining from her weekly professional development activities, while the literacy facilitators assisted teachers in implementing the new instructional strategies into their classrooms. Previously no more than 16% of Falls City kindergartners had ever left kindergarten with the ability to read, but after only six months of implementing the instructional changes, 49% of the kindergarten students were reading. Two years later, 74% of Falls City students left kindergarten as readers.

No longer do Falls City staff make excuses about their lack of readiness. Instead they assess reading skills when students enter and then systematically teach them to read. Where teachers used to "know" that children were coming to Falls City several years delayed and felt defeated before they began, now teachers "know" they can make up for that delay with focused, developmentally appropriate teaching.

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Underlying Concepts:

Changing mathematics instruction and performance

Improvement of learning requires intentional action, focused on identifiable goals. In this regard, Falls City chose mathematics as a vehicle for improving instruction. Leadership action at the school has demonstrated how results from standardized assessments were used to inform areas of instructional need—the scores were not employed simply as a mechanism for accountability to the community.

Mathematics turned out to be Falls City School's greatest success as staff worked to improve student learning after the 1992-93 CTBS scores motivated the teachers to change how they were teaching. In 1992-93 the fourth graders were in the 14th percentile for computation and 16th percentile for concepts and applications with a total mathematics score at the 14th percentile. Focused attention to mathematics instruction related to the new state mathematics standards assisted the school in raising student performance on the CTBS to the 62nd percentile for computation and 47th percentile for concepts and application in grade 4 with a total mathematics percentile rank of 55 on the 1997 test.

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning (mathematics)
- Strategic action

After disaggregating the results of the CTBS and the state exam, the mathematics facilitators planned problem-solving workshops and led study groups based on the state standards and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Standards. Teachers had a firm grasp on the teaching of number sense, but the fourth-grade teachers used the data from both state assessments to change their instruction to include more writing to explain mathematics thinking, explicit teaching of problem-solving strategies, critical-reading strategies to improve comprehension in mathematics and other content areas, and to encourage children to think in divergent ways about mathematics.

Pathways
- Student standards
- Curriculum
- Support for professional development
- Assessment

Meanwhile, the state mandated the norm-referenced Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) for third grade. Third-grade teachers had celebrated the success of the fourth graders and now they wanted to prove that third graders were successful students, too. In the spring of 1998-99 students took the ITBS for the first time and teachers found that, slowly but surely, their initiated changes were taking hold and students were able to transfer learning from one grade to the next, one classroom to the next. This was evidenced by the third graders' 61st percentile ranking in mathematics. The entire community was thrilled. High-poverty students were demonstrating that they were capable and could learn when provided optimal instruction. In mathematics, they scored slightly higher than the district average and state average.

Learning Agendas
- Student learning
- System learning

While Falls City celebrated their success, they continued to press ahead with instructional change. They were confident that reading achievement would continue to improve as teachers planned and implemented balanced literacy in their classrooms. They also were seeing more children leaving each primary grade reading at grade level. Teachers and administrators began calling this increase "the Falls City wave." Each year students were exposed to the new instructional strategies based on the state standards, the more prepared they were for the next grade and the more the students' overall achievement grew.

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Underlying Concepts:

Sustaining success through a leadership transition

Aware that transition in formal leadership can be a major obstacle to sustained school renewal, Falls City leaders approached the retirement of its principal in a way that preserved continuity of learning focus. Specifically, they secured strong support from the broader community for hiring an insider who was already passionately devoted to the school's focused effort and trusted by staff.

By that time, all Falls City classrooms were focused on the state's academic learning requirements and the matching district grade-level learning targets. Teachers and parents understood that no child could afford a year without added value. The principal of Falls City retired in 1999, and the assistant principal, who had also worked as one of the school's instructional facilitators, became the new principal. As the new principal, she was not a newcomer to the work underway. In fact, she had five years invested in the leadership of those changes. This investment enabled her to step into the principal's role and continue with the work that was already underway without disruption. The community recognized the importance of this transition, and was actively involved in supporting her hiring. This was another signal that the staff and parents of Falls City believed that the many reforms that had been implemented were changing the school for the betterment of the community's children.

Areas of Action
- Distribution of leadership
- Engaging environments

One of the first tasks the new principal and staff undertook was to write and implement a school-wide progressive discipline plan. Staff, students, and parents received a copy, and discipline records were kept. For the first time, everyone knew what was or was not acceptable behavior at school. The belief that all children could learn now also meant that all children would have the opportunity to learn and no disruption would be tolerated. For the first time, parents were called anytime a child was referred to the office. Now, after three years, discipline referrals are down, suspensions are down 44%, parents are supportive, and student achievement as measured by test scores and classroom work is high for any school, and especially a school in a neighborhood of high mobility and deep poverty.

Pathways
- Behavioral support & management

The school that had once been in the news for children who could not learn and teachers who could not teach, is now in the news for being a high poverty, high performing school. As of fall 2002, 65% of Falls City students met the standard on the fourth-grade state reading exam, a percentage equalling the statewide and district averages. A full 72% of Falls City children met the mathematics standard and 46% went beyond being just proficient to the exemplary level.

As in the Manchester case, the progress realized by Falls City occurred inside a larger district context and was no doubt attributable, in part, to the support demonstrated by district leadership in enabling positive change to occur. In the next section, we turn our attention to two cases that illustrate more explicitly how district leadership can make a significant difference for student learning, professional learning, and systemic change.

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Leading for Learning in District Contexts

School district leadership aimed at powerful and equitable learning depends on district leaders' ability to engage and respond to multiple environments. The variation in the character of environments across district settings is enormous, and these differences have important implications for any attempts to improve teaching and learning. However, the essence of leading for learning in districts begins with a focused learning and teaching agenda, and is sustained by efforts to keep that focus present in negotiating the broader environment—encouraging support where possible, fending off counter pressures where these arise, and buffering schools from conditions that would pose a barrier to a learning agenda. The success of these efforts depends, in part, on district leaders' ability to perceive opportunities in complex and often adverse conditions.

The next two cases are situated in contrasting environmental settings, in which districts have attempted to exert leverage over learning in different ways. Their efforts reflect the nature of the environments in which they operate, as they grapple in contrasting ways with the task of forging collective will, building a high-quality teaching force, and balancing discretion and initiative across levels. In each case the *Sourcebook* ideas are used as an analytic tool to help pinpoint where and how district actions can reach student learning.

Case 3

Highland School District: Data-Driven Cultural Change

Highland (pseudonym) is a K-8 suburban school district in a large metropolitan area with well over 7,000 students in roughly a dozen schools.[78] One longtime administrator explained that in the 1950s and 1960s the area used to be "a little bedroom community" serving predominantly White, English-speaking, middle-class residents. During the 1970s-1990s, the district's population became more diverse as increasing numbers of Latino and Asian families moved into the area. Many lower income families were also drawn to Highland's moderately priced apartments. Consequently, Highland has become an increasingly diverse district, both ethnically and economically. As one board member commented, "We have kids who come to school in limousines and kids who come to school barefoot and live in cars." Approximately half of Highland's students are White, one-third Latino, and one-tenth Asian, with the remainder a mixture of other backgrounds. About one fourth of all Highland students are English Language Learners, and one third receive free or reduced-price lunch.

When the new superintendent was hired in the mid-1980s, she faced a district that was typical of many in the state. The student population was growing increasingly diverse, and the district's scores were slowly declining. However, the causes of these achievement declines were not obvious at the time. According to the former associate superintendent, "I remember discussions about how 'our reading scores aren't what they used to be.'"

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Underlying Concepts:

Learning Agendas
- System learning

Pathways
- Planning & goal setting
- Information system development

Starting with data and strategic planning

Inspired by a personal interest in strategic planning, the superintendent "dragged" a couple of board members to a conference on the topic. Encouraged by what they learned, the superintendent began engaging the district leadership in conversations about strategic planning—using shared goals and joint analyses of student achievement data to guide future action. Before disaggregated data analysis was the norm in most school districts, the superintendent encouraged district leaders, and provided them with training, to examine data in greater depth. This analytic mindset prodded leaders to ask exactly which students were doing poorly on these achievement tests and what programmatic and societal features might be contributing to their low levels of achievement. Through sustained inquiry, observation, and discussion, it became clear that the district's teachers and instructional programs were not adapting to its changing student population despite the district's excellent reputation for teacher support and professional development.

Areas of Action
- Engaging environments (through school board)
- Building professional community

Pathways
- Leadership development

In addition to helping district leaders identify the primary causes of slumping achievement scores, the superintendent made significant strides towards developing collaborative leadership in the district. She cultivated a relationship with the school board, keeping them well-informed of her goals, concerns, and plans. In addition, she surrounded herself with capable leaders who complemented her abilities and shared her vision for the district, though who perhaps did not always agree with her on the best means of getting there. For example, the superintendent was not known as a "people person," being a very strong-willed leader who was "never satisfied with the status quo." However, the associate superintendent she hired had 30 years of experience in the district and was widely regarded as a people person, doing everything she could to support those under her supervision with both resources and personal encouragement.

Areas of Action
- Sharing leadership

Pathways
- Planning & goals setting
- Leadership development

Moreover, the superintendent distributed a considerable amount of authority to her leadership team and leaders at the local level. For example, when asked, district leaders could not produce an organizational chart for the central office. One administrator commented, "We got so frustrated trying to put a chart on paper because we see ourselves crossing roles so often. It just isn't a compartmentalized organization." At the school level, principals were expected to facilitate their own independent strategic planning sessions at their sites, rather than having the district's plan handed down to them. In addition, teacher-based curriculum committees empowered teachers to articulate their concerns, participate in identifying problems, and develop solutions with those in the central office. This process allowed for greater teacher ownership over the curriculum and cultivated more widespread acceptance of programmatic changes.

Highland's leadership focused on the district's common values and data analysis skills before launching any major curriculum or professional development initiatives. Through a focus on what they wanted students to learn, and development of data-analysis tools to identify the problems affecting student learning, the leaders were able to pinpoint these problems more accurately and devise more effective solutions. While many districts are preoccupied with crisis management and do not have this luxury, developing a common vision or set of core values and data-analysis skills among district leaders can be crucial first steps in developing a positive professional culture that can inform decisionmaking and improve program coherence.

Underlying Concepts:

Areas of Action
- Engaging environments

Pathways
- Planning & goal setting
- Community engagement

From the late 1980s into the early 1990s, Highland became more skilled at strategic planning—they improved the process by using third-party facilitators, stakeholder representatives from across the district, and a collaborative process that created a broad base of ownership. The superintendent noted the importance of broad involvement in the process:

> There have been some wonderful things that have come out of strategic planning by the people in our community as they look at schools and schooling with a different perspective. We have always felt that was the most valued part of the process because, otherwise, we would just talk to ourselves, and be doomed to repeat the same things we'd done before. But people from the outside make us look at ourselves because they have a different perspective. That's been very, very helpful to us.

While this process received positive reviews from participants, there were some complaints regarding stakeholder representation, notably the ELL constituency, and a minority of teachers and school staff continued to be unaware of the district's strategic planning and data analysis efforts.

Pathways
- Accountability systems

One important piece of this planning process was aligning resource allocation with strategic planning priorities. Changes in resource allocation as a result of strategic planning signaled to the participants in the planning process that this was not idle talk. Similarly, the superintendent made an agreement with the board to tie her performance evaluation to the district's progress on its strategic planning agenda.

Narrowing and maintaining the learning focus

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning (student learning, system learning)

The district continued to narrow its focus to concentrate on student achievement. While the original strategic plans had developed 10 or more goals, the strategic plans during this period only had a handful of goals, and they were more closely related to student learning.

Pathways
- Student learning standards
- Assessment systems

At this stage, the district was developing an increasing appetite for student achievement data. This desire for authentic measures of student achievement prompted the development of district performance assessments. Over the years, the district administrators engaged teachers in discussing and agreeing on learning standards and quality assessments that the district could use to evaluate student learning. After looking extensively at a variety of assessments including student portfolios, the district decided to develop its own performance-based assessments in reading, writing, and math. This involved an enormous amount of teacher and central office work over several years that produced assessments that reflected the knowing-by-doing philosophy of the district's leaders.

Pathways
- Support for special learning needs (ELL)
- Support for professional development

During these years, continued data analysis identified literacy as a major area of need throughout the district, especially among the ELL population. The district administrators and teachers adopted the Reading Recovery program and devoted extensive resources and training to early elementary literacy in grades K-3. The district leadership pursued grant money to enhance the organization's capacity to support this instructional initiative, and the teachers received extensive professional development by external trainers in reading assessment and instructional strategies.

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Underlying Concepts:

Learning Agendas
- System learning

Over time, the strategic planning, collaboration, and data-analysis initiatives initiated during the late 1980s, now ingrained as system learning, produced additional teaching- and learning-oriented program changes. District learning standards, performance-based assessments, and the focus on improving literacy instruction are examples of the district's leadership activity expanding along additional pathways in a coordinated fashion to improve student learning.

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning

In the late 1990s, the stability and consistency of focus among the district leadership is paying off. Strategic planning, collaboration, and data-driven decisionmaking are institutionalized, and there is a professional culture based on these practices that pervades the district leadership. The strategic planning process has continued to narrow its focus. Now leaders are charged with one goal: improve student achievement so that 100% of district students meet the district's learning standards.

By this time, the district has gained experience with its performance-based assessments. While this assessment measure is considered an essential means of monitoring student progress, two challenges have arisen. First, the state launched a very public accountability policy, requiring all students to take a multiple-choice, norm-referenced test, publicly ranking all schools according to their students' performance, and providing financial incentives aligned to the rankings. While the district continues to administer its own assessment, the state accountability system clearly overshadows the district's performance-based assessment in terms of public attention. Second, the district assessment scores are inconsistent, in ways that suggest that the test has questionable reliability. For example, the percentage of second graders meeting the standard went from 24% to 53% in writing from 1997 to 1998, while kindergartners' reading and writing percentages went from 53% to 33% and 62% to 90% respectively during the same time. Despite these challenges to the performance-based assessments, the district leadership continues to improve them in pursuit of a more accurate and comprehensive picture of student learning.

Building the professional infrastructure

Areas of Action
- Engaging environments (higher education)
- Building professional community
- Creating coherence

Pathways
- Preparation and certification
- Mentoring and induction
- Recruitment and hiring

Another development during this time is a partnership with a neighboring district and a local university. This collaboration promotes teacher learning and leadership in three ways. First, it provides teacher education to prospective teachers, including classes taught on site within the districts and yearlong internships for prospective teachers. Second, it supports teacher induction, providing new teachers with mentors, peer support, and continuing education opportunities. The district's ability to "grow its own" high-quality teachers has been a positive outcome of this partnership. One of the district coordinators of new teacher support reports:

> I think that it has provided us with a wonderful core of interns who are matched with teachers who demonstrate best practices. After going through our program, the interns move in, and they're pedagogically ahead compared to other first- or second-year teachers. One of their real strengths is that they have internalized reflective practice.

Underlying Concepts:

Pathways
- Leadership development
- Supervision & evaluation

Third, the collaborative offers experienced teachers a Masters degree program in teacher leadership, preparing graduates to be mentors and on-site professional development facilitators. This program has been especially popular, with over 50 teachers presently participating in the program from both partner districts. Similarly, experienced teachers in the district are offered an alternative to the standard principal's supervisory evaluation. The alternative allows teachers to pursue their own area of interest with a classroom-based action research project.

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning (literacy)

In addition, the literacy initiative has continued to gain momentum throughout the district. Recent developments include expanding kindergarten from half days to full days, providing substitute teachers to support peer coaching, and training master teachers with 16 weeks of off-site education to serve as on-site literacy coordinators in every school. These literacy coordinators are classroom teachers who are paid stipends "to build literacy tools at their schools." Once a month, teachers at all schools participate in literacy training for an hour and a half of their minimum day, with compensation provided for an additional two hours of optional training.

Learning Agendas
- Student learning
- Professional learning

Pathways
- Leadership development
- Support for professional development

Finally, the district has begun to provide substantive professional development to principals. Every other week administrative meetings no longer focus on "business," and instead are devoted to professional development. Often, principals are given reading materials in advance, and then the group discusses them. The district has also put principals into teams for visits to schools. Teams visit one of these principals' schools and conduct walk-throughs, comparing their analyses and providing that principal with feedback based upon their observations.

The district continues to build upon its prior successes. Over the years, a distinctive professional culture has developed around strategic planning, data-driven decisionmaking, literacy, and professional development. The district leadership actions have continued to broaden, including "growing their own" teachers, invigorating the profession with meaningful learning opportunities for teachers and principals, and developing the knowledge, structures, and practices to support literacy instruction within the district.

Case 4 Downtown School District: Accountability for Learning in an Urban Setting

Downtown School District (pseudonym) is one of 32 community school districts in a major urban center, where diversity has spawned both rich cultural resources as well as residential segregation.[79] Enrollment is approximately 15,000 students in grades pre-kindergarten through grade 8 (high schools are not part of the city's community school districts). The district is diverse, both ethnically and economically, though competition from private schools tends to draw off more affluent students. More than 80% of the students are children of color, mainly African American and Latino. Approximately 16% are English Language Learners, primarily Spanish dominant. About 6% are enrolled in full-time special education programs and more than 70% are Title I eligible.

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Underlying Concepts:

Over the past 12 years, the district has moved from a ranking of 31st out of 32 community school districts in reading achievement to 16th place in 1997, 15th place in 1998, and 10th in 1999. During this same period, the district moved from a ranking of 29th in mathematics achievement to 14th in 1999. Downtown administrators attribute the steady test score ascent to the amount of hard work and focus on professional learning, and accountability for that learning as it translates to schools making decisions about how to spend money.[80]

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning

Downtown's superintendent and the deputy superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and professional development have been pivotal forces in sustaining a focus on instruction, student standards, and accountability. Superintendent Sharon Murphy (pseudonym) has an established role in the district as someone in charge of professional development and curriculum. Prior to becoming the superintendent, she was the district's deputy superintendent of curriculum & instruction. In moving from her former position to that of superintendent, she has maintained a clear, strong commitment to instructional improvement.

Enacting a coherent instructional improvement strategy

Learning Agendas
- Student learning
- Professional learning

The district's overarching learning-improvement strategy features extensive investment in staff development, strong support for principals as instructional leaders, and a focus on literacy instruction (mathematics and science are also of concern to the district, but to a lesser degree). At the center of the district's policy strategy are ambitious learning standards—a blend of standards the state and city are promoting—and sophisticated notions about learning derived from the work by the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. The district leadership is well prepared to fashion and carry out such a strategy.

Areas of Action
- Sharing leadership

Pathways
- Support for professional development
- Student learning standards

Superintendent Murphy, a formal leader in Downtown for more than a decade (four years in the current position), brings expertise in matters related to literacy instruction. The deputy superintendent, though relatively new to the district, had many years of experience in professional development and leadership roles related to literacy teaching within similar urban settings. Though the new deputy and the superintendent had fairly different working styles, they saw eye to eye on the basic principles they were trying to realize. The deputy focused on professional development because in her view, "That's the most enormous work and the work that matters most—the ways in which we learn together as a district, within a city, within a state." The district's professional development opportunities converge around beliefs about standards, best practices, and the teaching and learning exemplified in the nine "principles of learning" from the Institute. The district's partnerships with institutions of higher education are consistent with its goals and coherent focus on literacy.

Areas of Action
- Strategic action
- Creating coherence

Pathways
- Student learning standards
- Support for professional development

Downtown's strategy combines high, explicit expectations for performance by teachers and students with aggressive outreach to schools. Supplementing the efforts of the district's top leadership, an army of staff developers serves the schools. These experts in literacy and math instruction are assigned to each school and regularly spend one or more days a week in them depending on the size of the school. Monthly meetings of school leaders are largely devoted to issues related to learning and teaching. Annual comprehensive plans by each school address areas of instructional improvement. And the district attempts to maintain a visible connection with each school, through "walk-through" visits by the superintendent and other district staff, during which they visit each classroom and offer the school feedback on its work and progress towards improvement goals.

Underlying Concepts:

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning (student, professional)

Pathways
- Support for professional development
- Accountability systems

On a daily basis, Murphy focuses much of her personal attention on efforts to shape professional learning, literacy improvement, and instructional leadership. Her instincts and professional commitments from the beginning had her designing a more elaborate district-led professional development system. At the same time, she was busy trying to get greater district control over instructional expenditures which struck her as poorly guided and not focused on student learning. She began to require all school purchase orders be reviewed by her first. If she thought they had nothing to do with instruction, she would not approve them:

> The schools 12 years ago looked so poor, it was depressing to visit schools. There were no library books in classrooms, no materials for children, no manipulatives. Now our schools look very rich because during my first year as superintendent, we poured money into schools, but I saw no difference in practice related to those materials and supplies. As I started the second year, there were radical changes in this district... resources will never be richer, but there are strings attached. If we don't deliver to the kids, then shame on all of us. I expect a payoff in children's learning. If the money you spend doesn't do that, then give back the money and I'll tell you how to spend it.*

The superintendent combined intense professional development efforts, pressure for results, and the expectation of accountability. Over the past 10-15 years, the district has consistently garnered $4 to $7 million annually from outside funding sources. Many of these funds have been used to support the district's on-site model for staff development. Even during a time of severe budget shortfalls, district officials stayed the course—their messages continued to be aligned to familiar themes of standards-based education and professional learning.

Aiming at leadership, learning, and results

Pathways
- Leadership development
- Support for professional development
- Restructuring meeting time
- Support for special learning needs

Murphy considers herself a learner and engages in opportunities to deepen her own understanding of powerful and equitable student learning. One prominent example of both her commitment and focus on learning was her participation in a study group with the Institute for Learning. She brought her four top district administrators, two directors of staff development, and three principals. Her goal was to have all of these people able to spread the word around the district, so there would be a connection between the Institute for Learning ideas about "principles of learning" and the district's efforts to enact instructional policy. Not surprisingly, given the immersion of key district players in these activities, learning became an overarching focus for what district educators were doing and expected to do. More specifically, the district was paying attention to learning about learning itself, and to learning about instruction.

Fueled by their exposure to ideas from the Institute and elsewhere, the superintendent, the deputy, and other district staff stimulated and guided the learning of administrators and teachers in a variety of ways. Now, principals' meetings—held every other month for a full day—are devoted almost entirely to topics related to learning and instruction, especially in literacy. Schools designated as struggling—those with a preponderance of bottom-quartile students—get additional attention. District administrators are expected to "be there" to

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Underlying Concepts:

provide advice, technical assistance, and mentoring for school leaders on a regular basis. The leaders of these "priority schools" also attend an additional school leaders' meeting once a month to further focus instructional priorities.

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning (district staff in schools)

Pathways
- Accountability systems
- Leadership development

The superintendent's regular walk-throughs of school buildings emphasize the "principles of learning," as well as other messages about curriculum and pedagogy. Murphy does her walk-throughs with an explicit focus on teaching and learning to "serve as a critical friend to the school leader." She moves through every classroom in the school and interacts with people as she takes note of what is there and what is going on. Murphy has an agenda of things she looks for (e.g., abundant displays of student work, especially "standard-bearing" work), and she freely talks to students to figure out how they are engaging with the material.

These walk-throughs send clear messages about particular things that the district values. At the same time, they indicate symbolically that the district is watching and will not be a passive player in what happens within the school. Each walk-through is followed by a detailed letter to the principal, which includes the superintendent's impressions and suggestions for improvements. School leaders appreciate the letters, which are detailed enough to demonstrate that the superintendent is knowledgeable and attentive to their work. For school leaders, the superintendent's letters serve as models for teacher evaluations.

School-based staff developers are also expected to engage teachers in professional learning guided by the principles of learning. They meet with the deputy superintendent once a month to engage with ideas about standards, the principles of learning, practice, and how to help prompt teachers. The district is seeking to build capacity at each building, through school leaders and staff developers.

The district's ideas built around standards, assessment, and accountability are from several sources: the New Standards project, which had been adopted and adapted by the city as a reference point for students' performance; the activities of the city's Chancellor of Schools on behalf of high standards and clear accountability for results on assessments linked to the standards; and the recent actions of the state mandating new assessments keyed to state standards (which are similar to the district standards), and strict student and school accountability for student performance in relation to these standards.

Areas of Action
- Focus on learning
- Building professional community
- Creating coherence

Pathways
- Curriculum
- Student learning standards
- Assessment systems
- Accountability systems

The district's conceptions of good teaching and worthwhile curriculum are also aligned with national standards emanating from the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, particularly as they relate to language arts instruction and developmentally appropriate instruction in early childhood education, respectively. For this district, meeting standards, practicing the principles of learning, and being aligned with current best practices is exemplified in a "balanced literacy" approach to the teaching of reading and writing. Balanced literacy became a strong district push and an explicit target of the superintendent's walk-throughs. The district expects teachers to have an extended literacy block, a visible word wall in every classroom, classroom libraries with "leveled" books (the district has garnered resources to be used for classroom libraries), and to place emphasis on guided reading.

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School leaders and teachers in Downtown perceive the district to be supportive of students, of change, and of staff. Many principals and teachers also comment on the quality of the staff development they have access to and on the district's generosity with resources. Opinions about specific initiatives are varied, representing the wide variation across the district's small schools, big schools, middle and elementary schools, though there are some commonalties. For example, nearly everyone is aware of what the district's initiatives are, and most people in the district seem to view themselves as "learners." There are, however, dissenting opinions at the school level. Though the district has a strong hand in the schools, it does take school-level resistance into account. At times, resistance by some schools is simply attributed to the "healthy tension" that is the result of the district's bottomline expectations. District administrators listen to the responses from school leaders and work to adapt their strategies to take school-level concerns into account.

Leading for Learning Over the Long Term

The cases presented in this section differ from one another in many ways. Not only do the leadership dynamics vary between elementary and secondary school, or between school and district, the settings present remarkably different circumstances in which to fashion powerful equitable education for young people. Downtown's leaders find themselves continually struggling with the issues of a major American city, while the leaders at Manchester work in a relatively affluent suburb. As illustrated earlier, leaders respond to the settings in which they work with learning improvement strategies tailored to the opportunities that each environment presents, drawing on the leadership strengths available in the school or district.

Yet different as these case stories are, there are striking similarities. In each, the school or district started out performing poorly and earning a reputation for poor performance. Somewhere or somehow, leaders responded to these circumstances by finding or creating a catalyst for change, a glimmer of possibility, or they simply refused to submit to continued failure. Each took advantage of the arrival of new leaders and the acquisition of new resources to build something different and better than what had been there before. In each case, leaders helped their colleagues become more focused on learning and on a manageable set of learning improvement goals. Leaders also found ways to continue their efforts, building a base for success and producing evidence of improved learning, while increasing capacity to sustain success over time. Finally, each achieved a stability and strength of leadership that transcended individuals and persisted over substantial periods of time.

Leading for learning is about achieving stability of leadership over the long term and bringing it to bear on the learning of both young people and adults in the system. This stability of leadership which eludes so many schools and districts may suggest these are atypical cases without the obstacles to learning improvement that so many others face, or simply that individuals of rare talents stepped forward to fill leadership roles. While there is no denying the talents of the leaders we have described, there is little to suggest these sites had it any easier at the outset than most schools or districts. What happened in those cases underscores the need for gradually building strategies that coherently connect a range of activities in support of learning.

PART III
Using Reflective Tools to Support Leading for Learning

Parts I and II described the conceptual connections between leading and learning and illustrated them through several cases of schools and school districts. The real power of the *Sourcebook's* ideas, however, is in their ability to stimulate reflection—to act as a catalyst for reflection-in-action as leaders seek to improve the quality and impact of their leadership. Part III, offers three glimpses of how the *Sourcebook* is actually being used by school and district leaders for this purpose.[81] In the first instance, its tools provide a means for implementing self-study and long-term professional development of school administrators; the second focuses on improving a district's strategic planning process; and the third uses the framework ideas as a foundation of a curriculum for leadership preparation and professional growth. These uses do not exhaust the possibilities, but they illustrate a range of potential applications of the *Sourcebook*.

To realize the utility of the *Sourcebook* requires sustained, interactive engagement. Experience suggests little is likely to develop from a onetime exposure to its ideas. As practicing leaders know, influencing learning is complex work—no matter what the context, there is no simple fix to ensure equity and excellence in learning. In each example, current and aspiring leaders have come together in groups of various sizes to work with the *Sourcebook* ideas over a period of time—across a week-long summer institute, through a strategic planning process of several months, and over a yearlong process of self-study. Given time and experience with the framework ideas, participants have gained important insights into the nature and future direction of their work as learning-focused leaders, and used these new understandings to take action.

Self-study in a suburban district

For Denny Easton (pseudonym), a 14-year veteran of the superintendency, the *Sourcebook* offered a vehicle for scaffolding a yearlong self-study with the rest of the leadership team in the Seaview School District (pseudonym). Seaview's leadership team includes Easton, four additional central office administrators, and principals from the district's eight elementary schools, three junior highs, and two high schools. The district serves approximately 7,700 students in a suburban area near a large city, and has built a reputation over Easton's tenure as a successful district. Yet, for Easton, this wasn't good enough.

In the fall of 2002, Easton returned to Seaview from a sabbatical year of graduate coursework that included immersion in the framework ideas and in-depth study focused on various pathways connecting leadership to learning. This study transformed how Easton views his role as Seaview superintendent. In September 2002, he noted:

> I am committed to serving as the "Superintendent of Learning" in the Seaview School District, with a singular emphasis on transforming the district at all levels into a learning organization. My work will focus on developing instructional leadership capacity throughout the district. I will be a teaching, coaching, mentoring presence in schools and classrooms. My overarching goal is to have our students learn at higher levels, experience success in academics and other activities and, in the process, be prepared to do well in whatever endeavors they undertake when they graduate.

Armed with this commitment, Easton refocused his primary work as superintendent toward the improvement of learning.[82] He began the 2002-03 school year with an intention to exert this influence on many fronts, including a concentrated effort to grow the learning-focused leadership of others in the district. Toward this end, Easton organized a yearlong seminar series for the entire leadership team, personally taking on the role of instructor, and using an early draft of the *Leading for Learning Sourcebook* as his primary curriculum. The work to date has enabled the leadership team to develop a common vocabulary and to begin to inquire deeply into their own practice as leaders. Through this work, Easton and the team have recognized a need to focus in on key "pathways" of influence:

> These pathways, or leverage points, include factors related to the quality of our teaching staff (hiring, training and retention), the cultivation of distributed instructional leadership, the advancement of professional learning, and development of efficient and effective support services. Interestingly, our study and research has revealed that the pathways connecting leadership and learning laid out two years ago in our strategic plan — entitled Goals 2004 — were very closely aligned with what the current research suggests are the most promising leverage points for improving student learning. Now, it is a matter of figuring out how each of us, as individual leaders in the Seaview system, can bring more coherence to our own work and focus on these key pathways that hold so much potential for positive change.

Part of the learning that can come from deep reflection and inquiry, using the *Sourcebook* ideas, is a sense of validation that leadership is heading in the right direction. For the Seaview team, in addition to offering a means for pinpointing areas in need of improvement, the framework provided a way to recognize where they are strong in supporting learning across the school system. Easton continues:

> As I said to the leadership team at our most recent seminar, the beauty of our "goal of greatness" for Seaview is that it is achievable. An honest assessment of where we are as a district today does reveal progress in achieving the major goals and sub-goals of Goals 2004. Professional learning in each of our schools that is focused on student work and targeted to enhanced teaching and learning is underway. Our support services are more effectively managed, and there is a commitment to provide efficient and effective service in support of teaching and learning.

Easton began the yearlong self-study seminar series with a leadership team academy, where he presented his vision for the work of leadership in Seaview. During the academy, the entire group was introduced to the *Sourcebook* ideas, and experienced their first opportunity to dialogue with each other about the implications of the framework for learning-focused leadership. The session had a powerful impact and was enthusiastically received by the team. Easton recalls:

> At our initial leadership team academy, I spoke to the members of the team about my determination to ensure that we make the transition from a very good to a great district. I also talked about my goal to focus on leveraging the key pathways connecting leadership to high quality teaching and enhanced student learning. The *Sourcebook* offered us a way to begin developing a common

> vocabulary and to see the system we all work in very differently, more holistically. I received very enthusiastic feedback from leadership team members following this academy. Uniformly, members expressed commitment to the vision, as well as to the obvious hard work ahead.

Easton plans to continue to use the framework with the leadership team for ongoing inquiry and professional development. This use provides one illustration of how a district leader has employed the framework ideas to rethink his own vision of what it means to lead in education, and has worked to transfer and grow that vision across the district administrative team.

Strategic planning in a rural district

For the leadership team in Northern Valley School District (pseudonym), the *Sourcebook* ideas and tools offered a conceptual framework for thinking through a revision of the district's strategic plan. Northern, a small rural district near the Canadian border, serves approximately 1,800 students across a high school, middle school, three elementary schools, and a birth-through-age-five Center for Children and Families. Superintendent Michael Jones and Assistant Superintendent Shelley Ames (both pseudonyms) comprise the central office administrative team and have worked together in Northern since the early 1990's. Jones developed the district's first strategic plan in 1993 through a process that included considerable staff and community involvement. The plan, always considered a work in progress, was updated again in 1998. As planning for a further revision began in earnest during the spring/summer of 2002, Jones and Ames were introduced to the *Sourcebook* tools and ideas and immediately recognized key conceptual connections between it and what they hoped to accomplish as learning-focused leaders in Northern.

Over the nearly 10 years since the original strategic plan was developed, the district has made progress on a number of fronts: assessment, accountability, curriculum, leadership development, involvement of the Northern parent community, and achievement of a level of coherence in staff development. Standardized measures of student achievement show significant progress over that time. In conversations about planning, Jones and Ames recognized they have learned a lot since the original plan was developed, and are ready to work with other leaders in the district (a group that includes principals, teacher leaders, coaches, and external consultants brought in for specific purposes) to move to another level. Says Ames:

> We are aware of what we're doing, but we're still working to understand how it all connects coherently. The framework tools helped us see how our current efforts come together, and where the holes are.

The planning process, ongoing since last spring, has resulted in a redraft of the Northern strategic plan. The revised plan opens with a mission statement that incorporates language similar to a thousand other strategic plans—language focusing on ALL students' learning. Yet, when questioned about this language, the depth of understanding and the persistent leadership focus on learning becomes clear. A middle school principal who serves on the planning team noted:

> "All kids" — what does that mean? The leadership team spent a lot of time talking about what it means, and realized we had to fully understand its meaning as leaders before we tried to explain it to staff/faculty. For us, at the middle school, we decided it means very simply that all kids—every single one—has an equal opportunity to meet the standards we've set for them. I think other (principals) would say the same.

The coordinator for the birth-to-five Children and Family Center further clarified how Northern leadership conceives of every student learning, and the necessary connections this implies across levels in the system:

> Ensuring all kids learn. This is a great idea, but at the Center we needed to align this with what we want to accomplish in the K-12 system. There was a real need to bring a greater level of intentionality for the early years, so that what we are hoping to accomplish in student learning at that level aligns with what we ultimately want throughout the system. So, when we create assessments for language and literacy development, for example, there is the intention that what we are assessing in our early learners matters for what comes next.

For Northern leaders, the *Sourcebook* provided a conceptual organizer that helped bring clarity to conversations about coherence and strategic action in the district planning process. When asked, for example, to articulate how Northern leadership engages with the broader parent/community environment in service of improving learning, Jones and Ames responded about what is, and what ought to be:

> Jones: I'll give you some specifics. At the middle school, engaging environments means the middle school principal having focus groups with eighth-grade parents to ask them what went well for their kid's school experience, what didn't go well, and their recommendations for improvement. At the elementary schools, it means developing family nights, partnerships with 4H, or the development of a health focus grant to work with the local hospital in tracking children's health needs. It means building community partnerships for the early childhood center. Our Children and Family Center coordinator has probably 20 such partnerships going—everything from the local community college to the hospital.
>
> Ames: Yes, and, what we've done so far to engage environments primarily involves physical partnerships. Intentionally, we've called these "learning partnerships" to signal that we are really learning and growing TOGETHER. However, what we don't have, and are trying to work on in our own system—and what a tool like the framework helps us to see—is the need to open up our practice to outside partners, and to each other. That's a key part of the adult learning piece.

Northern's revised strategic plan is organized around three levels of work, similar in structure to the way the *Sourcebook* presents the three learning agendas: student learning systems, adult learning systems, and system supports for the other two levels. Jones and Ames, working with the principals and teacher leaders, see that the district has thus far accomplished much with regard to student learning. They see the next stage of learning primarily focusing on adults in the system, and the necessary system supports to ensure that learning. They have come to believe that a focus on professional learning is the key to moving the district to even greater levels of accomplishment. Jones provides this example, regarding the teaching and learning of reading:

> In reading, we've been working to "get our head around the work that we're doing." If you look at the kids in our district, probably 70% of them are meeting our standards up through K-8. We're doing pretty well, but we're not done with this work. We've done a number of things that focus on the students—working on curriculum and assessment issues, extending the learning day for kids, building our center for early childhood learning, putting school accountability measures in place, working on student accountability, creating improvement plans, seeking additional funds, and so forth. These are the things we've done so far that have pushed us up to this level. I see all this work as a part of traditional "student learning" systems. So, we've been asking ourselves, what is going to push us to "ALL KIDS" learning?

> What we've realized is that we've got to talk about adult practice and adult learning in the same way that we've focused on the kids. You know, great assessment for kids is great assessment for adults. Great learning environments for kids are great learning environments for adults. So, what are the things we need to do? This is where a set of tools like the framework provides can be so useful. We see the need to focus on teaching and learning standards for our teachers and principals, understanding the attributes of successful classrooms, attributes of successful schools, building professional learning communities in our schools, delving deeply into cycles of inquiry focused on individual teachers' practice. We also need to build system supports around that—internal accountability, reciprocal relationships, distributed leadership, additional opportunities for professionals to learn, etc. So, this is the work now moving forward.

For Northern leaders, working with the framework ideas added a new level of coherence to the strategic planning process. The structure of the *Sourcebook* helps these leaders look to the future with more clarity, and maintain a focus on the "big picture" while still attending to the daily tasks of running a school or a system. The middle school principal notes:

> Work goes on while we try to refine our approach to achieving the vision/mission. There is an increased commitment to make sure that everything is aligned with that vision. That it makes sense. That we're not doing that knee jerk thing and off running with another good idea over here, or the next research thing over here. There's been a constant focus on "how do we build a plan that always is aligned with that vision for learning."

Professional development for current and future leaders

The *Sourcebook* ideas and tools can also be used as the organizer and content for professional learning experiences designed for current or future leaders, at either school or district level. A summer institute serving 35 such leaders in July 2002, illustrates.

The week-long institute, entitled "Instructional Leadership and System Renewal," was part of a leadership preparation program offered by a state research university, aimed at individuals wishing to assume system-level leadership positions in public education. The group included school administrators (principals and assistant principals), district-level administrators (e.g., assistant superintendents, directors of professional development), others working in regional educational service agencies, and several with roles in the state education agency. A few held other positions inside and outside of formal schools. For most of the participants, the course was the first step in a three-year curriculum leading to a superintendents' certificate and an Education Doctorate (Ed.D.). The remaining students were taking the course for continuing education credit or as part of other programs of graduate study. These participants worked in the full range of educational settings, from large urban districts to small rural ones, and in agencies serving this range.

The institute took place over five full days during which students explored instructional leadership and system renewal through lectures and discussion with institute faculty and guest presenters, group work on a problem-based case, "reaction panels" (student-guided sessions that offered commentary on the readings and presentations), and individual written work. Each day's activities were organized around a theme, starting with notions of learning and instructional leadership, followed in the second day by ideas about system renewal in a standards-oriented environment. The next two days addressed strategic, coherent connections with learning and teaching, followed by the ways leaders manage environments and non-instructional tasks. A final day focused on implications for redesigning educational systems.

In addition to readings (including an earlier version of this *Sourcebook*) and three sessions that introduced the framework ideas and tools, participants in the Institute interacted with these ideas in three other ways:

- **Critique sessions.** In small groups, participants worked through the framework ideas on several occasions, each time surfacing underlying assumptions and subjecting them to critique based on their own working experience and on the institute readings.
- **Problem-based project.** Based on a problem case that focused on a complex district leadership turnover scenario, participants were divided into planning teams with the task of preparing a study session for the school board on new strategies for improving learning in the district (collectively, the team assumed the role of the incoming superintendent). The scenario signaled to the planning teams that they should make use of the *Sourcebook* draft, where appropriate, but left it up to them to decide how. Teams presented their improvement plans to a panel of invited school board members on the last day of the institute.
- **Written portfolio.** Written work done across the week and in the ensuing two weeks, included analysis of the *Sourcebook* draft, a discussion of how its ideas applied to each participant's working situation, and a reflection on how participants' thinking about leadership had evolved, informed by the week's readings and activities.

These ways of interacting with the *Sourcebook* put institute participants into the role of learners, critics, and users of framework ideas. In combination, these roles helped them dig deeply into the meaning of the ideas and their possible application to the leadership challenges each faced, or was preparing to face, in new system-level leadership roles. A vignette of one planning team preparing its presentation to the school board illustrates the learning process at work:

> The six educators on the planning team are comparing notes on their respective read of the scenario and getting a sense of how they might proceed. They start by inventorying their own special expertise and pet theories of learning improvement. For a while they debate the relative merits of several different approaches to change, until one participant notes the *Sourcebook*'s insistence on the importance of engagement with the particular environment in which the district sits. That sets in motion a conversation about the particulars of the site, in an attempt to surface features that might hint at strategic starting points for an improvement strategy.
>
> The participants comb through the data attached to the scenario materials: data on school demographics, budgets, school performance, disaggregation of scores, teaching staff characteristics, and results of a union teacher satisfaction survey. It becomes clear there are striking disparities among the schools in performance, evidence of low teaching morale, and reluctance to put money into professional development. "Why not start with the teachers?" someone suggests. Another counters, "That might make sense, but do we have any idea about what our focus is? And if we are going after professional learning, how do we want it to relate to student learning, or to system learning, whatever that would mean in this site?" A third hauls out a figure from the *Sourcebook* draft and notes how the pathways in it trace back to a clearly articulated focus on learning. "Why not work on a sensible learning focus as a first step?" she says and sketches a blank version of the *Sourcebook* figure on a white board to keep track of the pathways that might be implied by the focus.

> The group brainstorms possible foci, but comes to no conclusions. There seem to be too many possibilities, and people don't feel they know the site well enough yet. Noting that the idea of "system learning" implies immersion in data from a site, several participants suggest dividing up materials from the database provided for the district scenario so that each can come in the next day with a more informed picture of the site, based on a careful read of different aspects of the data. The group distributes assignments and spends the remaining minutes of the two-hour planning period debriefing their progress.

In this planning session, taking place on day two of the institute, individuals are tackling a complex planning task in ways that are informed by the ideas and tools in the *Sourcebook*. Although not yet sure they grasp the full meaning of these ideas, participants are already using them as a kind of vocabulary for thinking about the challenges in front of them. Different "big ideas" from the *Sourcebook* (e.g., about engaging external environments, establishing a learning focus, locating "pathways" of potential influence) prompt the group to organize their thinking in particular ways (starting with an attempt to understand the setting and the problem they need to tackle); other ideas act as a prod to help group members surface and reframe their assumptions about the scenario and the particular problems of interest. In addition to the big ideas, group members pick up on one or another detail from the *Sourcebook* draft (e.g., a figure) and make use of it to dig into the case and the task at hand. While no one yet visualizes a solution to the problem, they are making productive headway, equipped by their emergent understandings of the ideas about leading for learning. Across repeated meetings of this and other planning teams, the active engagement with framework ideas leads to a richer understanding of the leaders' work and helps participants imagine productive courses of action.

How the framework helps leaders learn

When used in the ways just described, the ideas and tools presented in this *Sourcebook* serve several different functions. First, they synthesize a lot of thinking and research about the complicated work of leading learning organizations and present these ideas succinctly. Second, they constitute a roadmap of existing or potential connections between leaders' actions and learning processes or outcomes. Third, they validate work to date, offering users a coherent way to articulate and organize what they are already doing. Fourth, they challenge leaders to puzzle through the unsolved problems they face, given the configuration of resources and constraints in their own setting. Because the framework is not in itself a change theory, it invites users to form and adjust their own theories of action tailored to the unique circumstances of their own working setting.

But to have these effects, exposure to this kind of framework needs to happen in venues intentionally created for this purpose, guided by informed instructors, as implied by the above cases. In each case, participants gather with the explicit purpose of learning more deeply how they might shape and guide learning in their schools and districts. They struggle together to grasp what the *Sourcebook* abstractions might mean in their own settings, at the same time that they consider how the examples might apply to their work. By engaging each other repeatedly on these matters, their thinking has time to percolate and enrich each other, and they are better able to imagine action steps that are well grounded in the specifics of their respective settings.

Ultimately, this *Sourcebook* invites users to be selective as they find within it new possibilities, confirmation of some current practices, and challenges to other practices. Not all of the formulations in this framework will apply or be helpful to leaders who are trying to make sense of the challenges in front of them. But the exercise of interacting with these ideas may provoke users to develop other, better frameworks, that capture more effectively the relations between leadership actions and learning in a given setting. If so, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

Conclusion: Being There and Getting There

This *Sourcebook* points leaders towards promising possibilities and suggests routes and strategies for realizing them. But images of possibility are not all it will take to achieve the promise of education that continues to elude many American school children. Leaders often encounter formidable obstacles and must reach within themselves, while reaching out to their professional communities, to attain perspective and emotional strength to persist. The *Sourcebook* has no magic to make the hard work disappear or right the wrongs that have deep historical and societal roots.

For the many districts and schools that have not yet developed the kinds of leadership illustrated here, this framework of ideas and reflective tools offers perspectives and tools to move forward. It can help educators visualize powerful, equitable student learning, and the professional and system learning that is necessary to get there. It clarifies the core values that bolster these efforts, and emphasizes the need for professional communities that share those values. It prompts a hard and careful look at internal conditions and external environments, and points to places where leaders might search for solutions appropriate to their local settings. Ultimately, however, it is the work of motivated leaders that will advance educational systems toward powerful and equitable education.

In their struggle to lead for learning effectively, educators will need courage, humility, and a little help from their friends. They will encounter problems for which there are no known or apparent solution—what have been referred to as "adaptive" challenges rather than "technical" ones.[83] These challenges arise in the value tensions inherent in public schooling and in the complex politics that surround education, especially in large urban school districts. The challenges also reflect the intricacy and variety of human thinking, feeling, and motivation, not to mention the rich cultural diversity that learners bring to public schooling. And the challenges are intensified by large social forces that, for the most part, are beyond educators' control.

In the face of these challenges, educational leaders will only know the full extent of their influence on young people's learning if they develop a rich repertoire of possibilities, experiment with ways to exert constructive influence, and learn from their efforts. Few leaders are already there. Most are in the process of getting there or else are wondering how in the world to get started. For all, the *Sourcebook* should help them on their journey.

Appendix: Pathways to Learning

Part One briefly notes 23 different pathways to student, professional, or system learning (see Figure 7, p. 36). Each comprises a stream of functionally related activities—direct services, assistance to service providers, policymaking, program design work, etc.—undertaken by different people across levels of the educational system. These activities occur whether or not leaders capitalize on them as a means of positively influencing learning. School and district leaders' opportunities for exerting specific influence on the quality of learning and teaching lie along, and among, these pathways.

The pages in this Appendix briefly describe each pathway, noting potential participants who are in a position to exercise learning-focused leadership. Tables illustrate (1) opportunities for exercising leadership along the pathway; (2) points of connection with other pathways, and (3) implications of leadership actions for student, professional, or system learning. Pathways appear in the following order within the Appendix:

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Pathways focused on learners and learner support 86
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Support for noninstructional needs 87
Student placement and assignment 88
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Pathways focused on workplace and system 91
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Developing collegial connections 92
Leadership development 93
(Re)structuring time, program, facilities 94
Staffing and assignment 95
Recruiting and hiring 96
Information system development 97
Community engagement 98

The pathways are meant to illustrate key functions of a public education system that bear the most direct relationship to student, professional, or system learning. Other important functions are undertaken by such systems as purchasing, accounting, or managing transportation to and from school. While these, like everything in schooling, have implications for learning and teaching, their impacts are largely indirect and do not represent as potent a set of influences as others. Still other functions, such as resource allocation and governance, are so intimately linked with every pathway that little is gained conceptually in treating them as separate pathways.

There is more than one way of defining pathways. Related pathways, like mentoring and induction and support for ongoing professional development, could easily be combined into a broader pathway concerned with support for professional learning across a professional's career. Conversely, pathways described here, like "support for special learning needs" could be subdivided into a larger number of more narrowly construed pathways. Still others not mentioned here could be imagined. The arrangement presented here tries to strike a balance between breadth and differentiation; it captures functional pathways that are widely recognized within public schools and districts, and so will be familiar to most readers. Readers are strongly encouraged to develop their own pathway maps that better represent the functional arrangement of work in their respective settings.

The clustering of pathways is also a little arbitrary and at first glance may obscure the natural connections among them (the tables below draw attention to these connections). The current arrangement groups pathways by whether they aim primarily at content, teacher, or learner (the three elements of the instructional triangle discussed in *Part One*), with an additional set, aimed at workplace and system features, that are more cross-cutting. Thus, pathways should be thought of as more overlapping and interconnected than their presentation as discrete streams of activity implies. The disconnection of one function from another, as in some large, bureaucratized school districts, has obvious negative consequences for system coherence.

Pathways Focused on Content, Assessment, and Accountability

Student Learning Standards Pathway

The *student learning standards* pathway includes activity to develop and promulgate standards for student learning in particular subject areas and other areas of learning (e.g., generalized problem solving skills, citizenship education, health, etc.). Such standards often emanate from state educational agencies and district central offices but are also the product of national professional associations (e.g., the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) or of the staff in a particular school (see Meier, 2002). At district level, assistant superintendents (e.g., responsible for curriculum and instruction) and others with content expertise are likely to take the lead on developing, promulgating, and interpreting learning standards, as are their counterparts in schools (principals, department heads, teacher leaders, school-based coaches, etc.). Others outside the local educational system-such as staff with content expertise at state education agencies or professional associations-are also likely to be prominent in setting and interpreting student learning standards.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Convening conversations about the meaning of school or district learning standards
- Establishing school-specific standards for particular subjects and other areas of learning
- Developing links between standards, curricula, and assessments

District leadership opportunities

- Engaging schools and community in conversation about the purpose of learning standards
- Aligning district learning standards with those of the state

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Curriculum pathway	How do curriculum materials embody student learning standards?
Assessment pathway	Are these appropriate ways of assessing what the standards address? Are assessments mapped onto standards?
Professional development pathway	Do standards become a main focus of professional development?
Information system development pathway	What information can be gathered to show progress towards standards?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning
- Defines what students are to learn
- Establishes reference point for decisions about curriculum and for instructional planning

Professional learning
- Provides content focus for professional development
- Provokes consideration of "standard-bearing" work

System learning
- Provides reference point for system-wide data gathering
- Codifies expectations for students between and across schools

Curriculum Pathway

The *curriculum* pathway includes activity to define, develop, and/or select curriculum frameworks, plans, and instructional materials or equipment of all kinds (texts, workbooks, equipment, kits, technology, disposable materials). Curriculum enacted in classrooms comes about as the joint result of activity at many levels: individual teachers and groups of teachers who adapt or develop their own curriculum; school staffs who decide on school-wide curriculum, sometimes developing it collaboratively from scratch; and district staff who create scope-and-sequence frameworks, select materials, and/or construct them for use district-wide. State educational agencies, as well, play a big role establishing curriculum frameworks and other forms of curriculum guidance, not to mention the creation of preferred textbook lists. Others outside of the formal educational system (in professional associations, the textbook industry, and the community) also do much to define and create curriculum options for teachers.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities
- Engaging school staff in the development or adaptation of curriculum to meet learning improvement goals
- Reviewing curriculum for its relevance to a diverse student population
- Connecting school curriculum across grades in relation to standards and improvement goals

District leadership opportunities
- Developing curricular guidance and professional development in areas of improvement focus
- Aligning district curriculum with learning standards and improvement goals

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Learning standards pathway	How do curriculum materials embody student learning standards?
Assessment pathway	How well do classroom-based and other assessments capture what the curriculum teaches?
Professional development pathway	On what areas of the curriculum should school-level and district-level professional development most productively focus? What pedagogical content knowledge is required to teach the curriculum?
Supervision & evaluation pathway	What are critical curricular areas to observe via the supervision process?
(Re)structuring time, program, etc., pathway	Does the current time schedule enable the learning experiences called for in the curriculum?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning
- Establishes the specific content of what is taught and learned
- Adapts academic learning tasks to student learning needs

Professional learning
- Signals content and pedagogical learning needs for professional development
- Provides natural content focus for instructional supervision and evaluation

System learning
- Provides reference point for system-wide data gathering
- Contributes to coherence in program planning

Assessment Pathway

The *assessment* pathway includes selection, construction, administration, and interpretation of assessments of all kinds, ranging from assessments used by teachers in their daily work to annual system-wide standardized testing. Teachers are therefore active players in the assessment pathway, as are other school colleagues (e.g. school coaches, teacher leaders, and sometimes school administrators, who have assessment expertise). At district level, individuals working in the research/assessment office, along with decisionmakers responsible for curriculum or accountability, are likely to be involved in the design and conduct of district-wide assessment systems. Those who design and administer state-wide assessment systems are also major players, as are outside groups such as testing firms (which create assessments) and sometimes professional associations (which may help define standards for assessment practice).

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Interpreting state and district assessments to identify improvement targets for the school
- Convening school-wide conversations about the meaning and use of assessments, both internal and external to the school
- Using assessment results to pinpoint improvement goals, creating a sense of urgency for learning among staff and parents
- Developing robust school-level assessment databases

District leadership opportunities

- Selecting or developing an array of assessments that fully capture what is to be taught
- Aligning assessments with learning standards and the curriculum
- Engaging constituencies in critical conversations about what students are learning and how we know
- Using assessment data to create sense of urgency for student learning community-wide

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Support for special learning needs pathway	Can disaggregation of assessment data help to pinpoint special learning needs for particular groups of students?
Professional development pathway	What can professionals learn about their practice from a close examination of assessment data?
Learning standards pathway	Are we assessing what we expect students to know and be able to do?
Curriculum pathway	Are we assessing what we teach and how we teach it?
Information system development pathway	What systems can make assessment information of various kinds available to teachers and administrators in a timely way?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- With curriculum, pedagogy, and standards, defines operationally what students are to learn
- Demonstrates what students know and know how to do
- Communicates student progress to constituencies
- Uncovers inequities in learning across student sub-groups

Professional learning

- Provides content focus for professional development
- Provokes a reexamination of curriculum and/or pedagogy
- Offers a tool for teachers' inquiry into their practice
- Catalyzes equity and social justice agenda

System learning

- Provides one set of information on system performance
- Communicates student and school level progress to constituencies & public at large
- Updates benchmarks, creates coherence in planning, goal-setting processes

Accountability Systems Pathway

The *accountability* systems pathway includes activity to encourage internalized responsibility for performance and establish external controls to ensure that individuals assume their respective responsibilities. Controls typically mean attaching consequences to measures of student or professional performance for individuals, schools, or the district as a whole. Most accountability systems emphasize "vertical" controls imposed by leaders on subordinates (e.g., teachers or students), for example, the accountability mechanisms created by the state for districts, schools, and students, or the corresponding ones created by districts. Accountability systems may also be established more "horizontally" among colleagues, or emphasize mutual accountability of the individual to the system and vice versa.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Establishing professional accountability as a norm in the school
- Making the scrutiny of professional practice a regular feature of school life
- Inviting routine, critical community feedback on the school's progress toward established goals
- Establishing expectations for reciprocal accountability between leader and led

District leadership opportunities

- Embracing, adapting, or buffering external accountability systems to serve district's learning improvement agenda
- Establishing reciprocal criteria for district to hold itself accountable for supporting teachers and schools
- Communicating credibility and seriousness of purpose to district stakeholders
- Establishing expectations for reciprocal accountability between leader and led

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Developing collegial connections pathway	What norms can be developed among professionals that support mutual accountability for professional practice?
Assessment pathway	How and why are assessments and accountability structures connected?
Planning and goal setting pathway	Can accountability systems be based on joint goal setting at school or district level? Who is ultimately responsible for achieving the goals?
Professional practice standards pathway	How can explicit standards for professional practice be made the basis of accountability norms and systems?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Motivates student performance (if basis for accountability is understood and also fair)
- Operationalizes student's responsibility for the quality of learning
- Clarifies underlying theory of action at the level of the system

Professional learning

- Operationalizes professional responsibility for the quality of practice
- Provides catalyst for new professional learning

System learning

- Attaches action implications to what is learned about system performance
- Invites regular feedback from constituencies

Pathways Focused on Professionals and Their Practice

Standards for Professional Practice Pathway

The *standards for professional practice* pathway includes activity to make explicit a vision of good practice for teachers and administrators-that is declarations of what professionals should know and be able to do. As with student learning standards, state-level bodies (e.g., Professional Standards Boards, state educational agencies) and professional associations (e.g., National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Interstate Teachers Assessment and Consortium, National Association of Elementary School Principals) are a common source of such standards statements, but the district may create its own standards, as some have done. Although not usual, a single school might also create standards for the practice of its staff. Whatever the source of standards for professional practice, school and district leaders are in position to bring one or more sets of these standards to the attention of their staffs and to make the standards, or some adapted form of them, integral to the working life of their institutions.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Convening conversations about the meaning of district professional practice standards
- Using professional practice standards as part the recruitment and induction process for new staff, and supervision and evaluation of all staff
- Establishing a vision for professional practice within the school centered on equity and excellence

District leadership opportunities

- Developing district-specific teaching or administrative practice standards
- Identifying models and examples of exemplary professional practice in and outside the district
- Creating district accountability systems that acknowledge professional practice standards

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Student learning standards pathway	How well do professional practice standards reflect student learning standards?
Mentoring and induction pathway	Can mentors be found whose work exemplifies professional practice standards? How to best grow the professional practice of new or struggling teachers?
Professional development pathway	How can professional practice standards help define the agenda for professional development? How can we productively link with external bodies who focus on developing high-quality, professional practice (NBPTS, universities, etc.)
Assessment pathway	What information can be gathered to show progress towards professional standards of practice?
Compensation & reward pathway	How best to reward excellence in professional practice?
Support for special learning needs pathway	Does our vision for excellent practice meet the needs of ALL children?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Captures how teaching can best contribute to student learning
- Helps teachers reach ALL students

Professional learning

- Provides content focus for professional development
- Affords a basis for assessing one's own and others' work
- Creates vision for high quality practice

System learning

- Provides reference point for system-wide data gathering
- Focuses on instructional capacity building across the system
- Creates regional reputation for quality

Preparation and Certification Pathway

The *preparation and certification* pathway includes activity to admit teacher or administrator candidates to preparation programs (through traditional or alternative routes), offer preservice preparation in these programs, verify professional knowledge and competence (including entrance and exit assessment), and grant licenses for professional practice. The pathway also includes recertification at later stages in a professional career, as well as activity to attain a higher level of certification (as in teachers seeking the next level of certification in states which have a multi-tiered certification system). Much of the activity along this pathway takes place outside the purview of schools and districts-in professional associations, state government, and institutions of higher education. However, actions by school and district leaders can give meaning and value to certification (e.g., by encouraging National Board certification), assist with formal preparation (e.g., by entering into professional development school arrangements), and otherwise contributing to professional preparation and certification.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Setting up internship and student teaching arrangements with higher education institutions, and making arrangements for quality placements on site
- Supporting mentorship of uncertified teachers, including support of mentors themselves
- Leading/actively participating in the hiring process for new teachers

District leadership opportunities

- Creating incentives and other supports for teachers seeking higher levels of certification/education
- Seeking strategic partnerships with training institutions in the preparation of new teachers and leaders (including high-quality alternative-route programs)
- Valuing appropriate certification and preparation in hiring and assignment

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Curriculum pathway	In what ways are new staff prepared for the curriculum in use? How can the curriculum take full advantage of staff preparation?
Mentoring and induction pathway	Can mentoring roles be used to prepare staff for higher levels of certification (e.g. NBPTS) or leadership ?
Professional standards pathway	Is the school or district seeking staff with qualifications that match high standards for professional practice?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Establishes a baseline of knowledge, skills, and belief about improving student learning
- Insures the highest possible "floor" for teaching quality

Professional learning

- Shapes early professional learning and formation of professional identity
- Motivates and guides steps toward future professional learning

System learning

- Provides reference point for system-wide data gathering
- Develops ongoing, reciprocal relationships with regional institutions of higher education

Mentoring and Induction Pathway

The *mentoring and induction* pathway includes activity to help newly entering teachers or administrators solidify their skills at an early stage in their careers, usually through extended, focused interaction with more experienced peers. Such arrangements span a continuum from informal individual mentoring to formalized induction programs, sometimes undertaken in conjunction with an institution of higher education. Within schools, experienced teacher leaders, department heads, administrators, and staff developers or coaches may guide mentoring and induction work. Assisting them may be union staff, faculty from higher education institutions, or individuals working in professional development organizations outside the formal purview of the schools. District-level staff, among them, individuals responsible for professional development or assistant superintendents, may also design and lead activities along this pathway. While not typically involved, states may play a role in supporting or encouraging mentoring and induction.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Cultivating a cadre of mentors and connecting mentees with suitable mentors
- Mentoring and developing skills of school-level mentors
- Explicitly acknowledging issues of induction and making these part of school-wide conversation and problem solving

District leadership opportunities

- Creating expectations for school- and district-level mentorship (teachers and administrators)
- Identifying suitable sources of mentors and other forms of induction support in and out of the district
- Setting up and implementing mentoring arrangements for leaders and others in mentoring roles
- Establishing and allocating compensation to support the mentoring function

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Curriculum pathway	How can mentors be found with the appropriate subject-matter expertise and grounding in the curriculum?
(Re)structuring time, program, facilities pathway	Is regular time set aside for mentors and mentees to interact with each other? For other induction support activities?
Professional development pathway	How well are mentors reinforcing what teachers (or leaders) encounter in other professional learning experiences, and vice versa? To what extent are mentors focusing mentees on developing identified areas of need in their professional practice?
Staffing and assignment pathway	Can staffing assignments be used to encourage and solidify mentoring relationships? Do staffing assignments provide the greatest possibility of early success for teachers new to the profession?
Developing collegial connections pathway	How can mentoring and induction activities build collaboration among staff that might otherwise not occur?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Provides immediate intervention and assistance where staff inexperience limits student learning
- Spreads promising and tested practices supporting student learning

Professional learning

- Connects inexperienced staff with immediate assistance; strengthens leadership skills of experienced staff
- Encourages ethic of mutual responsibility for each others learning
- Builds professional community; recognizes instructional expertise

System Learning

- Helps establish "institutional memory"
- Builds instructional and leadership capacity simultaneously
- Builds and spreads district reputation as supportive of teachers

Support for Ongoing Professional Development Pathway

The *support for ongoing professional development* pathway includes the full range of activity aimed at the professional learning of teachers, administrators, and other staff. Though "professional development" is often equated with inservice workshops, a wide range of activities fall within this category, among them, individual coaching, institutes, professional development academies, intervisitation, and study groups. Developing curriculum together and other forms of collaborative work can also serve a professional development goal. Many individuals at different levels of the educational system contribute to these activities and can exercise leadership along this pathway: coaches, staff developers, teachers leaders, and principals in the school, for example; or at district level, administrators or other staff responsible for staff development, curriculum, assessment, student learning needs, and related functions. This pathway is especially open to leadership exercised by individuals outside the formal educational system, too, as in professional associations and unions, institutions of higher education, and non-profit professional development organizations.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Supporting schoolwide inquiry into questions of professional practice
- Making professional development in various forms a regular feature of school structure and routine
- Modeling professional learning in all aspects of the school's work

District leadership opportunities

- Allocating fiscal, intellectual, and human resources to a focused professional development function
- Identifying sources of support for professional learning outside the school district
- Instilling a professional learning norm in the central office staff, by modeling self as learner
- Working out district-union agreements that support powerful professional development

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Curriculum pathway	In what ways does professional development increase staff's command of the curriculum, pedagogy, AND the underlying subject matter?
Assessment pathway	How can assessment data be used as prompts for professional learning?
(Re)structuring time, program, facilities pathway	Where does the schedule make possible regular professional development activities of various kinds? Does existing available meeting time get allocated for professional development?
Support for special learning needs pathway	Can professional development be informed by, and include, considerations of special learning needs and ways for all staff to address them?
Supervision and evaluation pathway	How can the supervision function help to support, motivate, and define targets for, further professional development?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Increases likelihood that students will encounter a richer array of learning opportunities
- Increases likelihood that staff will be able to understand what and how students are learning
- Creates greater opportunities for all students to learn, regardless of their needs

Professional learning

- Makes professional growth and development an expected, routine part of practice
- Connects professional staff with key resources for their own learning
- Increases staff's repertoire of pedagogical techniques and content knowledge base
- Sharpens staff's capacity for understanding what students are learning

System learning

- Creates the mechanism for individuals to increase system capacity
- Strategically focuses available resources on improving learning across levels

Supervision and Evaluation Pathway

The *supervision and evaluation* pathway includes activity to oversee and guide the work of professional personnel, both for formative, developmental purposes and for more summative purposes. The supervisor is often an organizational superior (e.g., a principal supervising teachers' work or a district administrator supervising principals' work), and for summative purposes this is the most usual arrangement. However, a peer (as in collegial supervision models) or a third-party person (as in a district-sponsored coach working with a school administrator or teacher) can also assume a supervisory role. A variety of activities can count as "supervision", typically including observation of and commentary on the professional's work. In addition, the formal evaluative part of supervision can recommend or require changes in the supervisee's position or status.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Creating structures and expectations for regular interaction between supervisees and supervisors
- Distributing leadership for instructional improvement through supervision
- Using supervision and evaluation to surface issues for school-wide consideration

District leadership opportunities

- Modeling learning-focused instructional supervision and evaluation
- Providing a source of potential supervisors; creating flattened structures for the improvement of instructional practice.
- Developing district-wide criteria and rubrics for supervising and evaluating teachers and administrators

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Curriculum pathway	How well do the criteria for personnel evaluation reflect the subject matter base, range of pedagogical approaches, and learning assumptions embedded in the curriculum?
Compensation and reward pathway	Do supervisors publicly acknowledge, celebrate, or otherwise reward instances of strong practice of their supervisees?
Professional development pathway	Does supervision and evaluation link to expectations for professional growth and development?
Accountability pathway	How can supervision and evaluation encourage norms of responsibility for students and other forms of internal professional accountability?
Support for noninstructional needs pathway	Do supervision and evaluation processes help professionals spot and attend to students' non-instructional needs?
Leadership development pathway	In what ways are supervisory or personnel evaluation assignments set up and used to develop skills for emerging leaders?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Examines and verifies the connections between individual practice and student learning
- Provides a safety net for ensuring equitable student learning opportunities

Professional learning

- Identifies issues for individual professional improvement and bottom-line accountability
- Provides opportunities for supervisors' learning about the improvement of practice

System learning

- Establishes the means for exercising quality control of teaching

Compensation and Reward Pathway

The *compensation and reward* pathway includes the offering of monetary compensation and non-monetary reward for work performed, along with a range of incentives that acknowledge and encourage meritorious work of particular kinds. Thus, in addition to base pay and benefits, compensation packages may include bonuses for good performance, "combat pay" for work under adverse circumstances, and other forms of supplements to salary. These are often determined by district-level leaders-central office administrators in interaction with union staff and others who comprise the bargaining teams-working within a framework set by the state. School administrators have various ways to supplement the basic compensation package, sometimes with funding (e.g., for extra duties taken on) or with a range of more symbolic rewards, ranging from merely acknowledging publicly work well done to arranging assignments, facilities, materials, or other working conditions as a reward for performance.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Arranging stipends or other forms of compensation for staff who take on learning focused leadership or support roles
- Celebrating student and staff learning accomplishments in public ways
- Devoting significant building budget funds toward focused professional learning opportunities

District leadership opportunities

- Maximizing allocations of resources to directly support learning for students, and professionals
- Experimenting with compensation or rewards for learning-focused leadership activity of various kinds
- Working with the union, the state, and the community to increase overall levels of compensation

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Accountability pathway	Does the accountability system include a range of rewards for exemplary performance, as well as interventions for poor performance? How well does the system demonstrate "pay-off" for investment in improvement?
Professional standards pathway	Do compensation systems and other ways of rewarding staff reflect explicit standards for good professional practice?
Recruitment and hiring pathway	How can the system of compensation and rewards be used to help attract qualified individuals to teaching and administrative roles?
Leadership development pathway	What incentives can be set up to attract individuals to develop themselves as school or district leaders?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- May help motivate good staff to persist in teaching
- Celebrates and values success in student learning (where rewards are tied to performance)
- Supports progress toward professional learning goals

Professional learning

- May motivate learning about teaching practice and leadership work
- May support professional learning (where this function is explicitly linked to pay or else receives additional support)
- Promotes consistency between identified learning goals and fiscal policies

System Learning

- Represents system's investment in performance
- Offers reference point for performance measures, as "return on investment"

Pathways Focused on Learners and Learner Support

Support for Special Learning Needs

Along the *support for special learning needs* pathway, educators address the unique needs of particular categories of learner, especially those with limited English proficiency and identified disabilities, but also students deemed to be gifted or who come to schooling from backgrounds (e.g., shaped by poverty, cultural differences, immigrant status) that are not well accommodated by the regular school program. Serving these students well need not mean "special" or separate treatment, as in tutoring, pull-out programs, resource rooms, newcomer centers, gifted and talented tracks, or other conventional arrangements, which may be helpful but may also stigmatize or segregate learners. Various in-class and consultative arrangements can bring specialized help into the regular classroom for both these students and their teachers, while also helping other students develop healthy perceptions of and relations with their targeted peers. Finally, support for special learning needs can be built into the overall structure and philosophy of the school or district (as in inclusive or bilingual schooling arrangements). Aside from individuals with administrative responsibility, others are in a position to exert learning-focused leadership along this pathway, among them, district-level staff responsible for special learning support programs, professional development, and curriculum, and school-level staff with expertise particular learning needs (e.g., itinerant ESL teachers, special educators).

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Disaggregating/examining data with staff about the progress of students with special learning needs
- Establishing norms of joint school-wide responsibility for special learning needs
- Providing and funding access to ideas and expertise regarding how to service special learning needs

District leadership opportunities

- Making special learning needs a visible, high-priority part of district-wide improvement plans
- Adapting curriculum, staffing, and program structures to focus on special learning needs
- Assigning high-quality staff to students with special learning needs

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Family engagement pathway	What connections are forged with the families of students with special learning needs? How are they helped to support these learners?
Assessment pathway	Are there appropriate ways of assessing what the learners with special needs know and can do? How can assessment approaches be improved?
Planning & goal setting pathway	Do missions, improvement plans, etc., acknowledge and address special learning needs appropriately?
Support for noninstructional needs pathway	Are there mechanisms in place to systematically consider and address the noninstructional needs of students with special learning needs?
Collegial connections pathway	How can regular, learning-focused communication between general and specialized staff be encouraged?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Pushes toward more equitable student learning opportunities
- Identifies specific learning needs and ways to address them

Professional learning

- Provides a focus for professional development
- Helps professional staff see and work with learner differences

System Learning

- Develops a differentiated picture of system performance
- Highlights and signals pockets of inequity

Support for Noninstructional Needs Pathway

Along the *support for noninstructional needs* pathway are non-academic ways that schools support young people's readiness for, and engagement with, schooling. Nutritional programs, mental health services, and family support are among the most obvious kinds, along with other supports related to problems inhibiting learning (drug dependency, teen pregnancy, etc.). On the other hand, schools also address noninstructional needs through efforts to promote health, wellness, and fitness. All of these activities build a foundation for academic learning, while imparting other valuable benefits of schooling. The activities along this pathway are potentially quite varied, depending on the configuration of noninstructional needs in the school or district student population. As with special learning needs, the individuals with relevant expertise and access to resources at either district or school level (e.g., counseling staff, health educators, psychologists, drug specialists, physical education staff, nutritionists) are likely to be well positioned to exercise leadership along this pathway, alongside staff with more generalized responsibility for the school or district.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Establishing school-based services that address the most critical noninstructional needs
- Engaging parents in efforts to address noninstructional needs
- Creating opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between instructional staff and non-instructional support personnel

District leadership opportunities

- Establishing priority for noninstructional supports that show greatest promise for improving learning opportunities
- Forging alliances with community service providers; seeking funds that support noninstructional needs
- Developing communication and other bridges between academic support functions and noninstructional support functions

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Recruitment and hiring pathway	Are staff being hired with expertise in addressing noninstructional needs?
Professional development pathway	How are staff helped to learn about noninstructional needs, how to recognize them, and how they can be met?
Planning & goal setting pathway	How explicitly does the school or district address noninstructional needs in its planning and mission?
(Re)structuring time, program, facilities pathway	How well is the program constructed to integrate efforts to address noninstructional needs with the academic program?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Boosts students' readiness for learning
- Brings more varied resources to bear on teaching and learning

Professional learning

- Complements and enriches learning about classroom practice
- Creates greater awareness & sensitivity to non-instructional needs among instructional staff

System Learning

- Offers a more robust understanding of academic performance patterns and associated student needs

Student Placement and Assignment Pathway

The *student placement and assignment pathway* concerns grouping, clustering, or otherwise assigning students in particular classrooms, programs, schools, or tracks. Because instruction means the interaction of students with each other as well as their teachers, it matters a great deal who gets to learn with whom. Activities along this pathway include decisions by administrators, in consultation with other staff, about the size and composition of class groups (homogeneous or heterogeneous by presumed ability? large or small?). Decision can also address whether distinct tracks or programs will be created and who to admit to them (maintain a separate track for the gifted?), and the degree to which students themselves (or their families) can exercise choice in their assignment or placement. These decisions are intimately linked to notions of how special learning needs are best served, to the availability of staff resources, and other matters in the organization of schooling. Leaders at school level (e.g., principals or assistant principals, along with other staff) have a great deal to do with student assignment and placement, though district-level policies and program structures can also have an influence.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Convening conversations about assignment, placement, and tracking in the school, and the consequences of these decisions
- Focusing attention on the interaction of high standards for all with diverse student learning needs
- Creating team structures and other assignment mechanisms that reduce the size of learning groups for part or all of the school day

District leadership opportunities

- Establishing assignment norms and policies that minimize segregation of the most needy students
- Creating school assignment policies that balance parental or student choice with the need for balanced student bodies
- Promoting diversity alongside an equitable, excellent learning agenda across all schools within the system

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Staffing and assignment pathway	Are teachers and students assigned to each other in ways that maximize their ability to develop long-term relationships?
(Re)structuring time, program, facilities pathway	What structuring of time and program optimizes the placement of students in configurations that best support their learning?
Assessment pathway	How are multiple assessments best used to facilitate student placement?
Support for special learning needs pathway	How can students with special learning needs be placed so as to maximize integration with other students while providing needed support?
Family/parent engagement pathway	In what ways can parents (and the students themselves) meaningfully participate in student assignment and placement, including program choice?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Shapes how students can act as a learning resource to each other
- Optimizes group size and composition to support learning
- Creates diverse learning communities inside classrooms

Professional learning

- Challenges staff assumptions about serving learner differences
- Prompts new staff learning related to who is being taught

System learning

- Creates more optimal learning experiences for all
- Develops greater coherence between established learning goals ("all students learning") and organizational structure

Behavior Support and Management Pathway

The *behavioral support and management* pathway concerns young people's social learning. Activities along this pathway set expectations for the behavior of students and help them acquire appropriate behavioral skills, while maintaining appropriate levels of order and safety in the school. Behavioral support and management is best thought of as a teaching function for which all members of the school community are responsible, not just the principals, assistant principals, or special educators who frequently are called upon to manage "disciplinary" infractions or "behavior disorders". There are thus many potential leaders along this pathway, particularly when behavioral support and management is considered as a significant pathway connected to what and how students learn. While activity along this pathway is likely to be concentrated at the school level, system-level policies (e.g., concerning expulsions, suspensions, or safety-related issues) may also play a role.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Promoting norms of joint responsibility for student behavior
- Establishing explicit standards for behavior school-wide and consistently upholding them
- Recognizing and highlighting the connection between positive support for student behavior and learning
- Creating opportunities for staff to focus on and share positive classroom management strategies

District leadership opportunities

- Convening district-wide conversation about behavioral "problems" as symptoms of deeper needs
- Allocating resources to building capacity for working with serious behavior disorders
- Maintaining a central focus on student learning needs when adjudicating suspensions, expulsions, or truancy cases

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Leadership development pathway	Are emerging leaders helped to see behavioral support and management as a teaching function?
Family/parent engagement pathway	How are parents involved in the "teaching" function of managing behavior?
Mentoring and induction pathway	What supports are in place to help inexperienced staff engage learners in content while engaging each other appropriately?
Curriculum pathway	How can learning tasks be constructed and enacted to maximally engage students, thereby obviating one source of behavioral management issues?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Connects social and academic learning
- Sets a tone for learning and seriousness of purpose

Professional learning

- Helps staff connect behavior with quality of learning opportunities
- Expands staff capacity in supporting social learning and developing effective classroom management strategies

System Learning

- Builds a learning focus into all conversations about student discipline/management

Family/Parent Engagement Pathway

The *family and parent engagement* pathway concerns communication, outreach, and involvement in school affairs. School leaders, in particular, are in a position to inform parents about the school and its program through a variety of media, and also to welcome them as partners in supporting their offspring's learning. Various forms of outreach may also connect schools more closely with learners' families (e.g., through home visits, presence at community gatherings, parent education and other services that meet parents' needs). Conversely, leaders may draw parents into the school to assist with services to learners (e.g., as aides in teaching and other student support roles), decisionmaking (e.g., on site councils, PTA, task forces), or other school needs (e.g., translation, office support). These kinds of activities are largely the province of school leaders, though the district's broader attempts to reach the community (see community engagement pathway below) set the tone and stage for much of what schools do with parents.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Developing regular, multiple communication routes to parents in terms that they can understand
- Inviting parents to play a variety of roles in support of the school's instructional program, both in and out of the building
- Focus regular parent contacts & connections on the school's learning agenda
- Developing the means to give voice to parents who are traditionally not heard from in school based parent groups

District leadership opportunities

- Explaining to parents across the community the nature of and rationale for the curriculum
- Developing means to give voice to parents who are traditionally not heard from in district deliberations
- Using the district learning goals as the focus for convening parent forums

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Curriculum pathway	Does the curriculum connect in multiple ways to learners' home and community lives? Is it relevant for students?
Mentoring and induction pathway	Are new staff helped to connect with parents in regular and positive ways, and shown how to do this productively?
Leadership development pathway	How are emerging leaders given the chance to exercise leadership with parents and other community members?
Student learning standards pathway	Do parents have a voice in the development of learning standards for students?
Community engagement pathway	Can ways be found to offer service to members of the community who are not parents?

Implications of leaders' actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Strengthens an additional layer of support for student learning
- Helps parents understand what students are learning and why

Professional learning

- Combines professional and family considerations in improving staff practice
- Engages questions of the "relevance" of learning to students' lives

System learning

- Develops system-wide support for schooling practices (without which new practices will fail)
- Builds strategic partnerships with the parent community in support of learning goals

Pathways Focused on the Workplace and System

Planning and Goal Setting Pathway

The *planning and goal setting* pathway includes activity to create long and short range plans for improving learning and teaching in the school or district. Conceptually, these activities span a continuum from constructing broad mission statements and strategic directions to detailed planning to achieve specific objectives. (Some would view budgeting as an integral part of the development of an annual work plan; in the sense that this activity is directed towards the improvement of learning and teaching, it too belongs on this pathway.) Activities that establish planning processes are as much a part of this pathway as are attempts to produce the plans themselves. At the school level, administrators and others they involve in school governance (e.g., site councils, department heads, teacher leaders) are the most likely individuals to exercise leadership along this pathway. Many administrators and staff at district level might be involved, as might key stakeholders from the community.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Engaging the school community in both short and long-range planning for improvement of student and teacher learning
- Engaging external partners in developing school mission and plans
- Using inquiry into the school's functioning as a means for targeting program improvement efforts, and distributing leadership responsibility for guiding these inquiry processes

District leadership opportunities

- Centering district strategic planning on student, professional, and system learning
- Making learning improvement an explicit consideration in annual budgetary planning
- Promoting and supporting meaningful school-level planning

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Student learning standards pathway	In what ways are student learning standards central to school and district planning?
Collegial connections pathway	How can staff who normally don't communicate with one another be brought together through planning and inquiry processes?
Information system development pathway	What information is needed to support school and district planning? How can staff be part of developing that information?
Accountability pathway	How does planning nurture staff responsibility for carrying out the plans?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Ties goals and plans to student learning and evidence of it
- Connects classroom-level work to a broader learning agenda

Professional learning

- Enhances the prospects of intrastaff dialogue and informal professional learning
- Builds a "system view" of teachers and support staff

System learning

- Creates greater coherence among learning agendas
- Establishes system norms for cyclical planning processes

Developing Collegial Connections Pathway

The *developing collegial connections* pathway includes activity that improves working relations among professional staff while also developing joint work for them related to the improvement of learning and teaching. Team-building activities and basic mechanisms for improving communication among staff are part of this pathway, as are actions to create team structures, develop norms supporting collaboration, and assign collaborative tasks. Activity along this pathway thus relates to much of what is discussed in *Part One* under "Building Professional Community". Complementing the efforts of principals and superintendents along this pathway are many other potential leaders: in schools, department heads, team leaders, and site council members, for example; and in districts, unit heads and staff whose assignments crosscut the departmental structure.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Intentionally distributing leadership for different aspects of the school program, and trusting others to carry this load adequately
- Creating opportunities for school staff to understand their work as interconnected, and to get to know each other better
- Stimulating and engaging in conversations across grade-level and subject-matter boundaries
- Creating team structures that further interaction among staff

District leadership opportunities

- Promoting a learning focus in all areas of the district as a basis for joint work.
- Visiting schools on a frequent basis, and using visits as an opportunity to learn from and interact with staff members
- Modeling collegial connections among central office staff, and across layers of the district hierarchy
- Arranging and rewarding collaborative problem solving across the district

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Curriculum pathway	How are staff encouraged or required to communicate with other staff teaching the same subject? Across subject areas??
(Re)structuring, time, program, facilities pathway	Has the schedule been arranged to make possible regular communication among different groups of staff?
Professional development pathway	What professional development activities foster connections among staff who do not know each other well, or who do not work together often?
Staffing & assignment pathway	How can reassignment of staff encourage new and productive connections among colleagues?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Increases likelihood of equity in learning opportunities across classrooms
- Models positive interactions for students

Professional learning

- Enhances the prospects of intrastaff dialogue and informal professional learning
- Builds a base of trust among staff

System learning

- Increases prospects for consistency in instructional program across the system
- Builds trust across levels in the system hierarchy
- Enhances the spread of promising teaching ideas; builds capacity

Leadership Development Pathway

The *leadership development* pathway includes activity aimed at identifying, selecting, and nurturing new leaders for learning-related roles in schools or districts. This pathway aims at individuals already working in the district (the recruiting and hiring pathway, described below, addresses efforts to attract and secure new leaders or other professional staff from elsewhere). This pathway can overlap, in principle, with those concerned with mentoring and induction, or ongoing professional development, described earlier, though here the explicit goal is to prepare people for specific leadership positions. School and district administrative roles (principal or assistant principal, superintendent or assistant superintendent) are a likely target for activity along this pathway, given the increasing difficulty many school districts are experiencing when attempting to fill these positions of formal authority. But, in line with the notion of distributed leadership *(see Part One)*, the pathway includes the development of teacher leaders, individuals performing formal or informal team leadership roles, and many others-in fact any attempt to more explicitly increase the leadership capacity of the school or district. People already in leadership roles, aided by outsiders with the requisite expertise, are the most likely ones to exercise learning-focused leadership along this pathway.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Intentionally creating and supporting teachers in leadership roles
- Creating school governance arrangements that maximize the role and responsibility of various leaders
- Explicit planning for leadership transition, with particular attention to sustaining change efforts

District leadership opportunities

- Partnering with external leadership development resources
- Constructing explicit leadership succession and leadership "p peline" plans
- Developing the leadership capacity of the school board through study groups and other means

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Mentoring & induction pathway	Can mentorship roles be used to nurture future leaders?
Professional standards pathway	Does the school or district have explicit leadership standards and are these used to guide developmental experiences?
Recruitment & hiring pathway	Are leadership recruitment efforts devoted to the areas where the school or district is least likely to grow its own?
Community engagement pathway	How can interaction with the community be used to give potential leaders exposure and practice articulating a learning improvement focus?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Multiplies sources of support for student learning
- Focuses a wider array of leadership resources on student learning agenda

Professional learning

- Identifies promising participants for learning to lead for learning
- Creates new arenas for professional growth
- Builds a cadre of those who understand and operate from a "system view"

System learning

- Builds system capacity to lead for learning
- Increases supply of individuals who can facilitate system learning

(Re)structuring Time, Program, and Facilities Pathway

The *(re)structuring time, program, and facilities* pathway addresses a range of decisions that arise in designing or redesigning the school and district. The first of these concerns the scheduling of learning and teaching as well as establishing time for other professional work (note the close relationship with the student placement and assignment pathway). The second focuses on the definition of programmatic strands and groupings within the overall school or district program (here, the curriculum pathway is intimately involved, along with student placement and assignment). Third, the nature of the physical workplace is shaped by a parallel set of structuring decisions, from initial design of the space to subsequent decisions concerning how to use or alter it. Depending on how decisions are made in the school or district, virtually any professional staff may exercise learning-focused leadership in this (re)structuring work.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Creating regular blocks of time for staff interaction
- Focusing available professional meeting time on the learning agenda
- Creating blocks of student learning time to fit the needs of the curriculum and of learners
- Constructing programs that maximize the personalization of instruction

District leadership opportunities

- Creating opportunities and/or incentives for restructuring school programs to suit district goals and school-specific circumstances
- Avoiding, whenever possible, "one size fits all" mandates related to time, program planning
- Working with the union to enable appropriate school-level restructuring
- Considering facilities use and design in district long-range planning for learning improvement.

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Student placement & assignment pathway	What do assignment decisions imply for arrangement of the time schedule?
Curriculum pathway	Have the right kind of time blocks been created for the learning opportunities that are called for in the curriculum?
Professional development pathway	How can the day, week, and year be structured to ensure regular time for professional development?
Special learning needs pathway	Are programs and facilities set up with special learning needs in mind?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Creates the time spaces needed for student learning
- Enables attention to learner differences and special learning needs

Professional learning

- Makes time and space for professional learning to occur over time
- Enables regular interaction of professionals as learners

System learning

- Provides a basic resource for inquiry into system performance
- Aligns time, program, and facilities planning with the district's learning agenda

Staffing and Assignment Pathway

The *staffing and assignment* pathway concerns decisions about the kinds of professional staff who will work in the school or district, the kind of work they will do, and their deployment within and across school buildings or at the central office. Allocating these staff resources to assignments means defining position responsibilities, subject to conditions imposed by collective bargaining agreements or personnel policies, and the matching suitable individuals with these positions. Assignment of teachers within their fields of expertise is especially pertinent to the improvement of teaching and learning, though other considerations also have bearing on staff's capacities to effectively serve students or carry out related administrative duties. Individuals responsible for staff assignment in schools or districts (e.g., principals, department heads, district administrators) are in the best position to exercise learning-focused leadership along this pathway, though others (e.g., state policymakers) may play some role.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Making best use of available subject-matter expertise in the building and limiting out-of-field assignments
- Focusing highest quality teaching on students with greatest needs
- Minimizing reliance on specialized expertise in building the school's staff

District leadership opportunities

- Working with the union to set flexible yet rigorous expectations for defining position requirements
- Maximizing school-site discretion in the deployment of staff
- Focusing most capable building-level leadership on schools facing the most difficult challenges

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Special learning needs pathway	How are special learning needs taken into account in the assignment of staff?
Mentoring & induction pathway	In what ways are potential mentors who have the strongest capacity to support the learning improvement agenda found and deployed?
Compensation & reward pathway	Are there plentiful incentives and rewards for taking on difficult assignments related to the learning improvement agenda?
Leadership development pathway	How can staff assignments increase the opportunities for potential leaders to gain experience and support in learning-focused leadership roles?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Connects learners with individuals who can best facilitate their learning
- Matches content expertise with learners' needs

Professional learning

- Creates potential for formal and informal professional learning relationships to develop
- Sets the stage for new professional's learning (especially with unfamiliar assignments)

System learning

- Positions staff who can contribute to system learning at appropriate vantage points
- Builds capacity and expertise for dealing with most difficult system challenges

Recruitment and Hiring Pathway

The *recruitment and hiring* pathway concerns the attempt to attract and secure new teaching or administrative staff for the school or district. What professional staff know, know how to do, and are committed to doing greatly affects the way they address learning improvement throughout the system. Therefore, important opportunities confront individuals with hiring authority (e.g., principals, superintendents, personnel directors), along with others they may involve, to find and hire the "right" people, no less to define what kind of people might be "right". Activities include the creation of hiring policies and processes, advertising, and developing long-term relationships with likely sources of new staff (e.g., institutions of higher education). These tasks become especially important in settings experiencing high turnover or rapid growth. As the hiring function involves multiple levels, decisions about the distribution of authority for hiring between the district level and the schools are critical in this pathway (e.g., how free are schools to hire whomever they want?). Union leadership, exercised through collective bargaining, may also create conditions that affect recruitment and hiring.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Engaging school staff and community in defining criteria for new positions, and in the recruitment and hiring process
- Making the improvement of learning, along with relevant skills and commitments, a central part of the school's effort to attract, screen, and secure new staff
- Paying attention to and recruiting promising interns, particularly in key subject areas

District leadership opportunities

- Maximizing school-level role in hiring and the connection between hiring decisions and learning improvement agendas
- Creating strategic partnerships with sources of potential recruits (e.g., in higher education institutions, community groups, or farther afield)
- Streamlining hiring processes to enable early hiring actions

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Community engagement pathway	Where in the wider community are there sources of likely candidates for teaching and administrative positions? What kind of regular relationships with these sources can be cultivated?
Leadership development pathway	To what extent is the potential for learning-focused leadership considered in recruitment and hiring?
Preparation & certification pathway	How can involvement in the preparation process be used systematically to attract and secure well-qualified new staff in sufficient numbers?
Curriculum pathway	Are new staff sought with strong backgrounds in the areas of curriculum that show the greatest need for learning improvement?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Establishes the (initial) knowledge and pedagogical skill learners will experience in the classroom
- Increases likelihood of offering students with the best possible learning experiences

Professional learning

- Makes it possible to seek individuals who value professional learning
- Defines the mix of staff who participate as learners

System learning

- Represents the future "institutional memory" of the school or district
- Brings new potential capacity to the school or district
- Establishes coherence between learning agendas and hiring priorities

Information System Development Pathway

The *information system development* pathway includes activity to gather, interpret, and distribute data of any kind that have bearing on the quality of learning and teaching (activities along the assessment and accountability pathways are closely linked to the quality of information generated by activities described here). Activities range from installing information processing technology, to developing reporting routines and strengthening the capacity to interpret and use information for learning improvement (here, the link to the support for ongoing professional development pathway is key). Various individuals have the potential to exercise leadership in creating information systems that inform learning improvement, though administrators with a good overview of the system, along with others with expertise in managing and interpreting information about learning, are likely to play central roles.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Motivating and guiding school-level inquiry into school performance based appropriate information sources
- Setting expectations for information sharing across the school in relation to a learning improvement focus
- Creating school-specific measures of learning and teaching that matter to school staff
- Developing communication strategies that highlight learning goals and progress for parents and community members

District leadership opportunities

- Building a system that provides regular, timely information to school people about learning and teaching
- Modeling the use of information about learning and teaching in district deliberations
- Making systematic information about learning and its possible meanings part of interactions with the external constituencies

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Accountability pathway	How are incentives or consequences connected to information and is the information accurate and appropriate for the purpose?
Assessment pathway	Are multiple forms of assessing learning built into the district's information systems?
Professional development pathway	In what ways is systematically gathered information made available and central to professional development? How are staff prepared to understand and work with such information?
Planning & goal setting pathway	Is the information developed about learning and teaching aligned with plans and goals, or adjusted as plans and goals evolve?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Represents (in one way) what students are learning, internally and externally
- Establishes one reference point for student accountability

Professional learning

- Offers a focus for learning-focused professional development
- Represents various facets of professional practice

System learning

- Represents what the system is learning
- Creates one medium for system learning
- Makes transparent strategic planning processes related to learning improvement goals

Community Engagement Pathway

The *community engagement* pathway, a counterpart to the parent and family engagement pathway, concerns connections with the broader community served by the district and its schools. A wide variety of activities belong on this pathway, depending on the composition and political make-up of the community. Thus, district leaders, especially the superintendent and school board members, may work through local media, participate on community boards, interact with municipal government, form collaborative agreements with partner institutions (like universities or community-based social services), and seek funding or other resources, to mention only a few of the ways that might relate to a learning improvement agenda. Others at school and district level are also likely to exercise learning-focused leadership along this pathway, at the request of the superintendent or on their own initiative.

Illustrative leadership opportunities

School leadership opportunities

- Identifying sites for community-based learning
- Drawing members of the community into teaching and instructional support roles
- Making sensitivity to community cultures a norm for school staff in planning and delivering instruction

District leadership opportunities

- Developing ways of listening carefully, persistently, and publicly to community concerns about learning
- Educating key community groups about the district's learning improvement agenda
- Seeking out and engaging community-based leadership resources that are relevant to learning improvement

Illustrative points of connection with other pathways

Related Pathways	Linking Questions
Curriculum pathway	Where and how can the community be made into a learning resource within the curriculum?
Parent/family engagement pathway	In what ways does community engagement preserve the public voice of parents, especially those who are effectively disenfranchised, alongside other, more powerful community voices (e.g., the business community)?
Support for noninstructional needs pathway	How can community resources be mobilized to address noninstructional needs of students?
Planning and goal setting pathway	Are there ways to shape the learning improvement agendas publicly, with significant input from community stakeholders?

Implications of leadership actions for student, professional, and system learning

Student learning

- Encourages connection of student learning to the community in which they live
- Interprets student learning to key stakeholders

Professional learning

- Offers another source of professional learning resources
- Presents an important focus for professional learning (understanding the community)

System learning

- Serves as a sounding board for evidence of system performance
- Builds trust and credibility (and ultimately system-wide political support) beyond the walls of the organization

Endnotes

1 The ideas in this *Sourcebook* are based on research in the sense that concepts, frameworks, and empirical findings, where available, have been used to build the framework assertions. However, there is yet to be a definitive body of scholarship that supports assertions in each of the five areas of action, or all together, concerning the links between leaders' actions and learning outcomes. Our hope is that the claims presented in this document will be treated as hypotheses and more systematically tested by scholars in the years to come.

2 Information on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) can be found at the Consortium's website-**http://www.ccsso.org/isllc.html**. Standards for leadership practice issued by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* (Alexandria, VA: NAESP, 2002), illustrate what professional associations are doing in this realm.

3 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington. For more detail on this and other CTP studies, visit **http://www.ctpweb.org**.

4 The notion of instruction as the interaction of learners, teacher, and content has deep roots in theories of teaching, for example, the writings of David Hawkins concerning the "I-thou-it" relationship in science teaching, in the *Elementary Science Study (ESS) Reader* (Newton, MA: Education Development Center, 1970). For a recent formulation, see Cohen, D. K., Raudenbush, S., & Ball, D. L., "Resources, Instruction, and Educational Research," in Boruch, R., & Mosteller, F. (Eds.), *Evidence Matters: Randomized Trials in Educational Research* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2001).

5 Here, teachers' "pedagogical content knowledge" is central to what they are actually able to teach to young learners-see Shulman, L., "Those Who Understand: Teach: Knowledge Growth in Teaching," *Educational Researcher* (1986), *15*, 4-14.

6 See Burns, J. M., *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Gardner, J., "The Nature of Leadership," in Author, *On Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1990, pp. 1-10); and Leithwood, K., "The Move Toward Transformational Leadership," *Educational Leadership* (1992), *49*(5), 8-12.

7 The bulk of the instructional leadership literature has focused on principals. See Hallinger, P., & Heck, R., "Reassessing the Principal's Role in School Effectiveness: A Review of Empirical Research, 1980-95," *Educational Administration Quarterly* (1996), 32(1), 5-44; Hart, A. W., "Reflection-An Instructional Strategy in Educational Administration," *Educational Administration Quarterly* (1993), 29(3), 339-363; Leithwood, K., & Duke, D. L., "A Century's Quest to Understand School Leadership," in Murphy, J., & Louis, K. S., *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, pp. 45-72); and Murphy, J. "Methodological, Measurement, and Conceptual Problems in the Study of Administrative Instructional Leadership," *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis* (1988), 10(2), 117-139. Syntheses of this work for practitioners span the past two decades, as in Smith, W. F., & Andrews, R. L., *Instructional Leadership: How Principals Make a Difference* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1989) and Glickman, C. D., *Leadership for Learning: How to Help Teachers Succeed* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002). Across the same two decades, some studies have addressed the superintendent's role as an instructional leader, as in Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J., "The Superintendent's Role in Promoting Instructional Leadership," *Administrator's Notebook* (1982), 30(6), pp. 1-4; Murphy, J., & Hallinger, P. "The Superintendent as Instructional Leader: Findings from Effective School Districts," *The Journal of Educational Administration* (1986), *24*(2), 213-231; and recently, Peterson, G. J., "Demonstrated Actions of Instructional Leaders: An Examination of Five California Superintendents," *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, *7*(18), on the Web at **http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v7n18.html**.

8 See Elmore, R. J., *Building a New Structure for School Leadership* (New York: The Albert Shanker Institute, 2000); Lambert, in *Building Leadership Capacity in Schools* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 1998) argues for a broader, more powerful view of school leadership that parallels the thinking presented here.

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9 See Ogawa, R., & Bossert, R., "Leadership as an Organizational Quality," *Educational Administration Quarterly* (1995), *31*(2), 224-244.

10 Recent scholarship focuses heavily on the how leadership fosters organizational learning and performance, as understood through various conceptual frames. See, for example, Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W., *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002); Pfeffer, J., *The Human Equation* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1998); Argyris, C., "Teaching Smart People How to Learn," *Harvard Business Review* (1991), May-June; and Garvin, D., "Building a Learning Organization," *Harvard Business Review* (1993), July-August.

11 The notion of "powerful learning" is rooted in cognitive approaches to the study of teaching and learning. See, for example, the summaries of related work in Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.), *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington DC: National Academy Press, 1999), and Brandt, R., *Powerful Learning* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998). Scholarship on equitable learning opportunities and results has a long history, most recently in writings on closing the achievement gap and on education that is culturally relevant to the lives of young people who have been historically underserved by schools: for example: Corbett, D., Wilson, B., & Williams, B., *Effort and Excellence in Urban Classrooms: Expecting-and Getting Success with All Students* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); Ladson-Billings, G., *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994); Meier, D., *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

12 See Newmann, F., King, M. B., & Secada, W. G., "Intellectual Quality," in Newmann, F. M. & Associates, *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996) for criteria defining high-quality or powerful learning opportunities made available to students.

13 See Wiggins, G., "A True Test," *Phi Delta Kappan* (1989), *70*(9), May; Newmann, F., Marks, H., & Gamoran, A., "Authentic Pedagogy and Student Performance," *American Journal of Education* (1996), *104*(4), 280-312; Shepard, L., "Using Assessment to Improve Learning," *Educational Leadership* (1995), *54*(5), 38-43.

14 Research has begun to pin down particular areas of professional learning for leaders that have specific implications for student and teacher learning-for example, how school and district administrators understand subject matter, student and adult learning: see Nelson, B. S., "Lenses on Learning: Administrators' Views on Reform and the Professional Development of Teachers," *Journal for Mathematics Teacher Education* (1998), *1*, 191-215; and Spillane, J. P., "District Policymaking and State Standards: A Cognitive Perspective on Implementation," in Hightower, A. M., Knapp, M. S., Marsh, J. A., McLaughlin, M. W. (Eds.), *School Districts and Instructional Renewal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002, pp. 143-159).

15 Many opportunities for professional learning arise in interactive contexts and are well described in literature over the last decade on teacher learning, professional development, and collegial community. See, for example, Darling-Hammond, L., "The Quiet Revolution: Rethinking Teacher Development," *Educational Leadership* (1996), *53*(6), 4-10; Little, J. W., *Excellence in Professional Development and Professional Community* (Washington, DC: Office of Education Research & Improvement/U. S. Department of Education); Wilson, S. M., & Berne, J., "Teacher Learning and the Acquisition of Professional Knowledge: An Examination of Research on Contemporary Professional Development," in Iran-Nejad, A., & Pearson, P. D. (Eds.), *Review of Research in Education, 24* (1999), 173-209; Little, J. W., & McLaughlin, M. W., *Teachers' Work: Individuals, Colleagues, & Contexts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993); Kruse, S. D., Louis, K. S., & Bryk, A. S., "An Emerging Framework for Analyzing School-based Professional Community," in Louis, K. S., & Kruse, S. D. (Eds.), *Professionalism and Community: Perspectives on Reforming Urban Schools* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1995, pp. 23-44); and Lieberman, A. & Grolnick, M., "Networks and Reform in American Education," in Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (Eds.), *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, pp. 292-312). Evidence connecting professional development with student learning is scarce, but a few studies offer some evidence, as in Cohen, D. K., & Hill, H. C., "Instructional Policy and Classroom Performance: The Mathematics Reform in California," *Teachers College Record, 102* (2001), 9-26; and Carpenter, T. P., Fennema, E., Peterson, P. L., Chiang, C. & Loef, M., "Using Knowledge Of Children's Mathematics Thinking In Classroom Teaching: An Experimental Study," *American Educational Research Journal* (1989), *26*, 499-531.

16 The concept of "system learning" here is analogous to some discussions of "organizational learning." Well established lines of research outside of the education field are reflected in Sproull, L., & Cohen, M. (Eds.), *Organizational Learning* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996). This literature is broader than popularized notions of "the learning organization," as in Senge, P., *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990). For application of the notion within education, see, Fullan, M., *Change Forces: Probing The Depths of Educational Reform* (London: The Falmer Press, 1993); and Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (Eds.), *Organizational Learning in Schools* (Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets-Zeitlinger Publishers, 2002). Operationally, work on "nested learning

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communities" comes close to realizing one form of system learning in relation to student and professional learning-see Resnick, L., & Hall, M. (1998), "Learning Organizations for Sustainable Education Reform," *Daedalus* (1998), *127*, 1-13.

17 See Simon, H., "Bounded Rationality and Organizational Learning," in Sproull, L. & Cohen, M. D. (Eds.), *Organizational Learning* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1999, p. 188-194)

18 Scholars have not systematically investigated these five sets of claims about the relationship between leaders' actions and learning outcomes. Some suggestive evidence resides in research on high-performing schools and districts, especially recent studies of high-poverty schools and districts that are substantially improving achievement gaps-e.g., Charles A. Dana Center, *Hope for Urban Education: A Study of Nine High-Performing High-Poverty Urban Elementary Schools* (Washington DC: U. S. Department of Education/Office of the Under Secretary, 1999), Haycock, K., *Dispelling the Myth: High-Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations* (Washington DC: The Education Trust, 1999); Learning First Alliance, *Improving Achievement, Building Instructional Capacity: A Study of Instructional Reform in Five Improving, High-Poverty School Districts* (Washington DC: Author, 2003); Snipes, J., Doolittle, F. & Herlihy, C., *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement* (Washington DC: Council of Great City Schools, 2002). A more established tradition of research on effective schools-for example, as summarized in Levine, D. U., & Lezotte, L. W., *Unusually Effective Schools: A Review and Analysis of Research and Practice* (Madison WI: Center for Effective Schools Research & Development/University of Wisconsin/Madison, 1990) also demonstrates many of these leadership actions at work within schools that show sustained patterns of high student performance, although with limited measures of learning. Recent research suggests a connection between leaders' actions and professional learning for teachers-for example, Blase, J., & Blase, J., "Principals' Instructional Leadership and Teacher Development: Teachers' Perspectives," *Educational Administration Quarterly* (1999), *35*(3), 349-78. Direct effects of leadership action on system learning are more transient, and difficult to capture empirically, although at least one comprehensive analysis of studies focused on principals' contributions to school effectiveness suggest a measurable, but indirect, influence on school effectiveness and student achievement via a focus on vision, mission, and goal-setting-see Hallinger, P., & Heck, R., "Exploring the Principal's Contribution to School Effectiveness: 1980-1995," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* (1998), *9*(2), 157-91.

19 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

20 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

21 Modeling learning and other ways of "walking the talk" are potentially powerful ways for leaders to communicate both the importance and the substance of a learning focus-see, for example, Barkley, S., Bottoms, G., Feagin, C. H., & Clark, S., *Leadership Matters: Building Leadership Capacity* (Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board, 1999).

22 Scholarship on the schooling of children of color and those from high-poverty backgrounds emphasize the central role played by leaders' beliefs in the learners' capabilities and in their staff's capacity to work productively with these learners-for example, Lomotey, K., *African American Principals: School Leadership and Success* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Sizemore, B., "Madison Elementary School: A Turnaround Case" in Lomotey, K. (Ed.), *Going to School: The African-American Experience* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), and Scheurich, J. J., "Highly Successful and Loving Public Elementary Schools Populated Mainly by Low-SES Children of Color: Core Beliefs and Cultural Characteristics," *Urban Education* (1998), *33*(4), 451-491.

23 See Deal, T., & Peterson, K., *The Leadership Paradox* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), and Sergiovanni, T., *Moral Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

24 Research on teaching for understanding in literacy, mathematics, and other subject areas implies that teachers and schools with strong backgrounds and high standards in these subject areas are likely to support powerful learning experiences for students-see Knapp, M. S., & Associates, *Teaching for Meaning in High-Poverty Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995).

25 Work on "effort-based conceptions of intelligence" is especially articulate about human potential-see Resnick, L. B., "From Aptitude to Effort: A New Foundation for Our Schools," *Daedalus* (1995), *124*, 55-62. Such conceptions are implied, if not stated, by volumes of research demonstrating that high expectations help to produce high student performance, especially in settings where students are not well served. A classic review of this evidence appears in Brophy, J. & Good, T., "Teachers' Behavior and Student Achievement," in Wittrock, M. (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching, 3rd Edition* (New York: Macmillan, 1986, pp. 328-371).

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26 Research on closing the achievement gap underscores the role of a strong commitment to equity. See references in Endnote 22 above, and many other writers, among them, Darling-Hammond, L., *The Right To Learn: A Blueprint For Creating Schools That Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

27 Regarding notions of mutual accountability, see Resnick, L., & Glennan, T., "Leadership for Learning: A Theory of Action for Urban School Districts," in Hightower, A. M., Knapp, M. S., Marsh, J. A., McLaughlin, M. W. (Eds.), *School Districts and Instructional Renewal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002, pp. 160-172). The related idea of shared responsibility for student learning appears in work on organizing schools to support teacher learning, compensatory education, and closing the achievement gap.

28 See Hord, S., *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* (Austin TX: Southwest Educational Laboratory, 1997); McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E., *Professional Learning Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Szabo, M. (1996), "Rethinking Restructuring: Building Habits of Effective Inquiry," in McLaughlin, M. W., & Oberman, I. (Eds.), *Teacher Learning: New Policies, New Practices* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996, pp.73-91). Recent work on organizational learning in education also underscores the role of inquiry in improving learning, for example, in Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (Eds.), *Organizational Learning in Schools* (Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets-Zeitlinger Publishers, 2002).

29 See, for example, high performing schools and districts referred to in Endnote 18 and instances of focused leadership cited in Endnote 31.

30 Here, brief examples are given of what this area of leadership action can "look like" in schools and districts, corresponding subsections appear in each of the ensuing four areas of leadership action. Though appearing to emphasize observable action-that is, what leaders *do*-the argument is meant to imply that much more than behavior is involved. That is, underlying beliefs, understandings, and strategic thinking inform and guide these behaviors.

31 For example, see Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., & Herlihy, C., *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement* (Washington DC: Council of Great City Schools, 2002); Elmore, R. F., & Burney, D., "Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff Development and Instructional Improvement," in Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (Eds.), *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, pp. 263-291),

32 Source: Newmann, F. M., Smith, B., Allensworth, E., & Bryk, A. S., *School Instructional Program Coherence: Benefits and Challenges* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2001).

33 See Hightower, A., *San Diego's Big Boom: District Bureaucracy Meets Culture of Learning*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2001).

34 At both school and district level, "focus" (though not always described by this term) appears repeatedly as an attribute of systems that are able to improve student learning. See, for example, at district level, Murphy, J., & Hallinger, P., "Characteristics of Instructionally Effective School Districts," *Journal of Educational Research* (1988), *81*(3), 175-181; and more recently, Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., & Herlihy, C., *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement* (Washington DC: Council of Great City Schools, 2002). School-level research on learning improvement makes a similar point, as in Newmann et al. (2001)-see Endnote 32 above.

35 Source: Ongoing research on district investment in professional development, conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

36 Source: Ongoing research on the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

37 Source: This example was offered by a principal in an inner-city elementary school serving a largely African-American student population in a large mid-western district.

38 Strictly speaking, to effect improvement in student learning, professional communities do more than "value" learning and "support each other"; they build knowledge together about what can be done to improve learning (their own and the students) and they put what they learn into practice.

39 Source: Ongoing research on the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

40 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

41 See Lortie, D., *Schoolteacher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Little, J. W., "The Persistence of Privacy: Autonomy and Initiative in Teachers' Professional Relations," *Teachers College Record* (1990), 91, 509-536; and

Huberman, M., "The Model of the Independent Artisan in Teachers' Professional Relations," in Little, J. W., & McLaughlin, M. W., *Teachers' Work: Individuals, Colleagues, & Contexts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993, pp. 11-50).

42 See Louis, K. S., & Kruse, S. D. (Eds.), *Professionalism and Community: Perspectives on Reforming Urban Schools* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1995); Talbert, J. E., & McLaughlin, M. W., "Teacher Professionalism in Local School Context," *American Journal of Education* (1994), *102*, 123-153; Little, J. W., "Organizing Schools for Teacher Learning," in Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G., (Eds.), *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, pp. 233-262); Lord, B., "Teachers' Professional Development: Critical Colleagueship and the Role of Professional Communities," in N. Cobb (Ed.), *The Future of Education: Perspectives on National Standards for America* (New York: The College Board, 1994).

43 See Stein, M. K., Silver, E. A., & Smith, M. S., "Mathematics Reform and Teacher Development: A Community of Practice Perspective," in Greeno, J. G., & Goldman, S. (Eds.), *Thinking Practices In Mathematics and Science Learning* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1998, pp. 17-52).

44 See Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S., "Toward a Theory of Teacher Community," *Teachers College Record* (2001), *103*(6), 942-1012.

45 See Payne, C. M., & Kaba, M., "So Much Reform, So Little Change," *Journal of Negro Education* (2001), 2. The litany of resistances described in this piece demonstrates what school leaders may face in seeking to build professional community.

46 Source: Charles A. Dana Center, *Hope for Urban Education: A Study of Nine High-Performing High-Poverty Urban Elementary Schools* (Washington DC: U. S. Department of Education/Office of the Under Secretary, 1999, pp. 28 ff.).

47 See Westheimer, J., *Among School Teachers: Community, Autonomy, and Ideology in Teachers' Work* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998); McLaughlin, M.W., & Talbert, J. E., *Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Gallucci, C., *Communities of Practice and the Mediation of Teachers' Response to Standards-Based Reform*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2002. The critical distinction is not necessarily that some communities of practice are closed or open to external ideas, but rather that their members are or are not willing to consider alternatives to their own and conventional practice in trying to improve classroom instruction. In their stance towards outside ideas, their beliefs play a large role.

48 Source: Gallucci, C., *Communities of Practice and the Mediation of Teachers' Response to Standards-Based Reform*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2002.

49 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

50 While these examples concentrate on resistances to professional community building, examples elsewhere in this document show already-formed professional communities hard at work on the improvement of their practice (see school-level examples in sections on Engaging External Environments and Creating Coherence).

51 The literature on urban school reform, among others, is filled with accounts of the constraints imposed by the local community and municipal environment on public schooling-see for example, Hess, F., *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 1999)-and also significant leadership resources for reform-see Hill, P. T., Campbell, C., & Harvey, J., *It Takes a City* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2000).

52 Source: Markholt, A., *Se Hace Camino al Andar: Development of Critical Capacity in an Urban Elementary School*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2002).

53 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

54 See Talbert, J. E., & McLaughlin, M. W., "Understanding Teaching in Context," in Cohen, D. K., McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (Eds.), *Teaching for Understanding: Issues for Policy and Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993, p. 167-206).

55 See Fullan, M., "The Learning Organization and its Environment," in Author, *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform* (London: The Falmer Press, 1993, pp. 84-103) for a balanced picture of the environment as a source of ideas, other resources, potential partnerships, and political pressures.

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56 A well-established literature on the sociology of organizations argues that institutionalized organizations such as public school systems are heavily dependent on their environments for resources and legitimation; see, for example, Meyer, M. (Ed.), *Environments and Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978).

57 Source: Stanford, J., *Victory in Our Schools* (New York: Bantam Dell Publishing Group, 1998).

58 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

59 See Carter, G. R., & Cunningham, W. G., *The American School Superintendent: Leading in an Age of Pressure* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), who articulately explore the challenges of superintendent-board relationships.

60 Source: Learning First Alliance, *Improving Achievement, Building Instructional Capacity: A Study of Instructional Reform in Five Improving, High-Poverty School Districts* (Washington DC: Author, 2003).

61 Source: Adapted from Jones. K., "Closing the Mathematics Achievement Gap in Lakesend School District." Unpublished paper, Renton WA, 2002.

62 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

63 Various lines of thinking and research suggest the potential power of what we are calling "strategic action" for improving student learning. Work on systemic reform, for example, argues that coherently connected policy actions are likely to boost student achievement. Though more fully developed regarding state-level action-see Clune, W., *Toward a Theory of Systemic Reform: The Case of Nine Statewide Systemic Initiatives* (Madison, WI: Center for Educational Research, University of Wisconsin/Madison)-the ideas apply equally well at the local level. A related and recent line of work highlights leadership actions that parallel many of the "pathways" referred to in this document: see, for example, Murphy, J., *Leadership for Literacy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, forthcoming). At the school level, comprehensive school reforms are another example of attempts to address learning improvement through multiple, coordinated lines of action-see Berends, M., Bodilly, S. J., & Kirby, S. N., *Facing the Challenges of Whole School Reform: New American Schools After a Decade* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002). Emerging arguments about new approaches to district leadership, as in Institute for Educational Leadership, *Leadership for Student Learning: Restructuring School District Leadership* (Washington, DC: Author, 2001), embody a version of the strategic approach discussed here. The argument here, however, places greater weight on leadership action that promotes and supports a particular locally determined learning focus and takes advantage of local pathways and environmental conditions.

64 See Elmore, R. J., *Building a New Structure for School Leadership* (New York: The Albert Shanker Institute, 2000); Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B., "Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective," *Educational Researcher* (2001), *30*(3), 23-27.

65 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

66 Source: Research on school leadership in the context of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford CA: Stanford University.

67 See Fullan, M., "Coordinating Top-down and Bottom-Up Strategies for Educational Reform," in Elmore, R. F., & Fuhrman, S. H. (Eds.), *The Governance of Curriculum* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1994), for an explication of the middle ground between the two extremes discussed here.

68 Source: Ongoing research on the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

69 Source: Snyder, J., "New Haven Unified School District: A Teaching Quality System for Excellence and Equity," in Hightower, A. M., Knapp, M. S., Marsh, J. A., McLaughlin, M. W. (Eds.), *School Districts and Instructional Renewal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002, pp. 94-110).

70 See S. H. Fuhrman (Ed.), *Designing Coherent Education Policy: Improving The System* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993); and Fullan, M., *Leading in a Culture of Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001) regarding district-level coherence. See Newmann, F. M., Smith, B., Allensworth, E., & Bryk, A. S., *School Instructional Program Coherence: Benefits and Challenges* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2001) regarding coherence at the level of school programs.

71 The program of research investigating New York Community School District #2 documents a long-term pattern of student achievement gain in a district with a coherent and sustained strategy for improving student learning, especially in the areas of greatest human resource investment-see Resnick, L., & Harwell, M., *Instructional Variation*

and Student Achievement in a Standards-Based Education District-CSE Tech. Report No. 522 (Los Angeles, CA University of California: Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 2000, August). Some other districts employing similar strategies appear to have similar gains, at least in the short-term, though the causal links are not as fully established-see, for example, Hightower, A. M., *San Diego's Big Boom: District Bureaucracy Meets Culture of Learning*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2001). Other evidence suggests that a wider range of district strategies, not necessarily emphasizing "nested learning communities" may also bring about substantial learning gains, as suggested by Learning First Alliance, *Improving Achievement, Building Instructional Capacity: A Study of Instructional Reform in Five Improving, High-Poverty School Districts*, Washington DC: Author, 2003). The evidence in such instances attests not only to the overall increase in levels of performance, but also a lessening of the gap between the highest and lowest performing students.

72 See Elmore, R. F., & Burney, D., "Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff Development and Instructional Improvement," in Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, pp. 263-291).

73 Source: Ongoing research on district investment in professional development, conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

74 Source: Burch, P., "Constraints and Opportunities in Changing Policy Environments: Intermediary Organizations' Response to Complex District Contexts," in Hightower, A. M., Knapp, M. S., Marsh, J. A., McLaughlin, M. W. (Eds.), *School districts and instructional renewal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002, pp. 111-126).

75 Source: Ongoing research on the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

76 See Copland, M., "The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative: Building the Capacity to Lead," in Murphy, J., & Datnow, A. (Eds.), *Leadership lessons from comprehensive school reforms* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2003, pp. 159-184).

77 Source: This case was developed, in collaboration with a member of the institute described in Part III and her principal, regarding an elementary school in a moderately sized urban district serving 32,000 students.

78 Source: Adapted from ongoing research on the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

79 Source: Ongoing research on the relationship between policy environments and teaching practice (the "Core Study"), conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

80 While the relative gains made by this district over a fifteen-year period are impressive, they may represent, in part, demographic changes over the same time period. That analysis has not yet been done.

81 The uses of framework ideas illustrated here took place while the *Sourcebook* was still under development, and hence reflect early draft versions of this document. All three sets of users were exposed to the *Sourcebook* ideas in the weeklong summer institute described in this section, offered by the University of Washington in July 2002. While the Framework ideas serve different purposes for users and settings in these examples, a wider range of uses and users can be imagined.

82 Though unaware of Negroni's work, Easton was engaged in a parallel journal of discovery to that recounted in Negroni, P., "The Superintendent's Progress; Moving from 'Lone Ranger' to Lead Learner in an Urban School System," in Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., & Kleiner A. (Eds.), *Schools that learn* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 2000, pp. 425-432).

83 See Heifetz, R., *Leadership without easy answers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994).

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